

PlayStation® Official Magazine - UK

Welcome



Making this issue was like our version of The Godfather Part II. Against all

expectations it was bigger, darker, and arguably ended up even better than the one that went before. We didn't quite get to the point of rowing out into the middle of the lake and tearfully shooting one of the team for betraying the family. Although reviews ed Nathan came close.

Particularly during the endless shouting matches over the scores. Wherever possible multiple writers will play a game in order to ensure a balanced verdict. I don't buy the 'well it's all subjective, innit' position when it comes to games. There's a technical element – a broken camera, say, or a shoddy framerate – that is more than just a matter of opinion.

Why mention this? Well because scores are more important than ever. Developers live and die on their Metacritic results, and with so many games competing for your time and cash, you need balanced, considered, and hopefully entertaining, reviews to rely on. Let us know how we're doing. Finally, be sure to check out p18 for some exciting gossip. God bless Hollywood.

Tim Clark Editor

tim clarks futurenet.com

COVER REVIEW



FEATURES



LITTLEBIGPLANET INTERVIEW

Rummaging through the brains of one of the key men behind the mighty LittleBigPlanet.



IN THE MOOD FOR... CELEBRITIES

We wait on the red carpet for PS3's most awkward cameos and overpaid guest stars.









WE LOVE PSN

We reveal what's in store for PlayStation's glittering new online empire in 2009.

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We Love PSN
The future's bright, the future's downloadable.

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CALL OF DUTY: **WORLD AT WAR**

The WW2 jungle is crawling with Japanese snipers and zombies. Wait, what?

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Next issue on sale 23 December



PlayStation Official Magazine - UK

Who we are...



Tim Clark

Our Cesc-loving ed signed for Spurs in PES's Become A Legend mode, just so he could ruin their season.

Game of the moment Favourite royal **Zara Phillins**



Ben Wilson Deputy editor

Was dragged before HR and given a final warning after asking a colleague if she'd like to 'stroke his sackboy'

Game of the moment Smackdown Vs Raw 2009 Favourite royal The Lion King



Leon Hurley Commissioning editor

Returned from Japan with dodgy sweets and a case full of harajuku socks.

Game of the moment Resistance 2 Favourite royal Elena from Street Fighter



Rachel Penny Agenda editor

Rach got married then spammed Facebook with pics of her cuddling up to the love of her life. (Her iPhone.)

Game of the moment Favourite royal King Kong



Nathan Ditum Reviews editor

Now speaks purely in scores. "It's a 7! No, wait... maybe an 8?1 mean a 6 It's definitely a 6. I think. Game of the moment

Prince Of Persia Favourite royal Kate Middleton



Helen Woodey Operations editor

Hels' clampdown on office dopting Fudge, Cork and Pritt as favourite cusses. Game of the moment Odd Job Eddie

The Duchess

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gift ideas



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Resistance 2 PS3 £39.99



Abba Singstar PS3 £24.99



Prince Of Persia: PS3
5 December
\$39.99*
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Guitar Hero World Tour Complete Band Pack: PS3 £149.99

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On your Clisc



Here at OPM, we don't deal in naughty or nice lists during the run up to Christmas. We spread the love evenly – like this month's Blu-ray. The unconditional generosity kicks off with ten new demos, including Smackdown's thunderous

return to form, the mighty Soulcalibur IV, Motorstorm Pacific Rift's no-rules racing and footy favourite FIFA 09. We've also

hand-picked our favourite demos from previous issues, so if you're new to OPM or missed 'em first time round, consider this your catch-up. Last up we have a brand new video section that, each month, will be packed with footage of hot PS3 games.

Rachel Penny Agenda editor



Soulcalibur

Incredibly deep, blade-assisted beat-'em-up that will satisfy newcomers and hardcore scrappers alike with its silky smooth combat. Play our demo and take up arms as either Nightmare, Cassandra, Tira or Nathaniel 'Rock' Adams.

This month's exclusive highlights...



Motorstorm Pacific Rift

Tackle the vertiginous Rain God Spires track from Sony's off-roader, either solo or in two-player split-screen.



Star Wars: The Force Unleashed

Let rip with Force powers in the TIE Fighter Construction Facility level as grown-up Star Wars comes to PS3.



WWE Smackdown vs Raw 2009

This year's outing is a welcome return for WWE's wrestling royalty. But don't just take our word for it.



FIET OO

Get stuck into the best FIFA yet by playing an exhibition match as one of six teams, including Chelsea and AC Milan.



What if my disc doesn't work

If it definitely doesn't work, send the disc to 'Disc Returns, OPM, 30 Monmouth St, Bath BA1 2BW' and we'll replace it. You can also email questions to nom@futurenet.com

Also on the disc this month Playable The Last Guy, Fracture, Pure, Hail To The Chimp, NHL 2K9, 1942: Joint Strike, Echochrome, Pixeljunk Eden, Wolf Of The Battlefield: Commando 3, Civilisation Revolution, Top Spin 3, Battlefield: Bad Company, Enemy Territory: Quake Wars, Haze, Race Driver Grid, Guitar Hero: Aerosmith, Robert Ludlum's The Bourne Conspiracy, Overlord Raising Hell, Lost Planet: Extreme Condition, Everybody's Golf World Tour. Video Need For Speed Undercover, Mirror's Edge 2D version, Tomb Raider Underworld, Ferrari Challenge, Fatal Inertia, LittleBigPlanet.



COMING SOON





First Departure...









A JOURNEY THROUGH TIME AND SPACE





Stories everyone's talking about...

You bet!
Odds on PS3's
Xmas number
one unveiled.
Page 14



King of Sony Shuhei Yoshida talks to OPM. Page 16



What next for LBP?

Media Molecule's post-release plans.

Page 19



The numbers game

Top devs on how they react to review scores.

Page 20

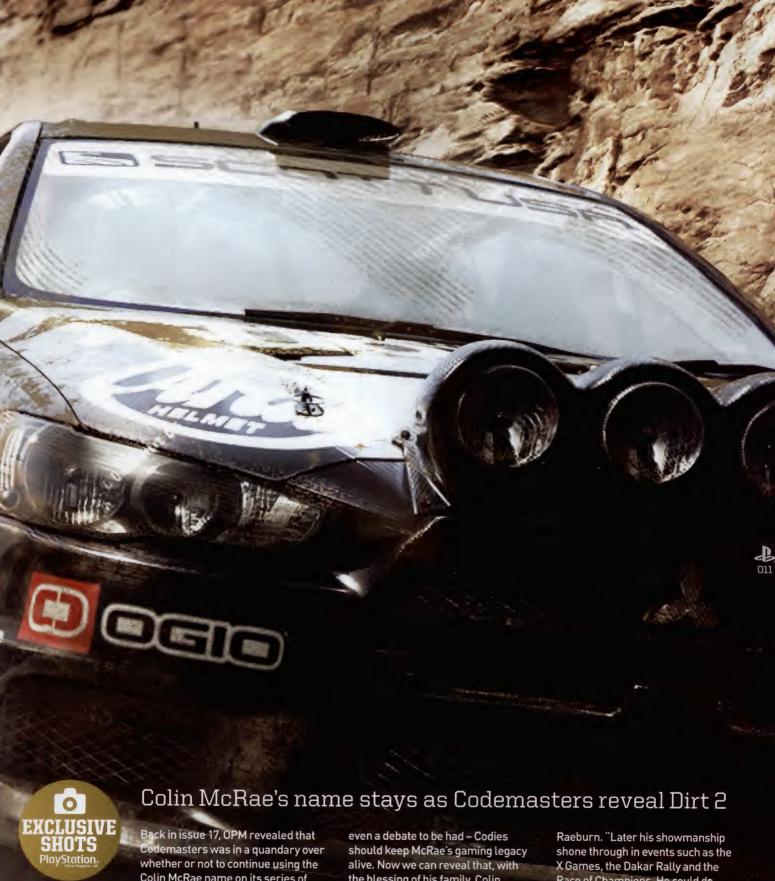
Drive smarter

How to be PS3's answer to Lewis Hamilton.

Page 22







Back in issue 17, OPM revealed that Codemasters was in a quandary over whether or not to continue using the Colin McRae name on its series of rally games after the champion driver was killed in a helicopter crash aged just 39. It looked like a no-win situation: if they continued using his name they might be accused of cashing in on his legacy, but if they left it behind some might call them cold and callous. Yet the huge number of you who wrote in to us were unanimous in saying that there wasn't

even a debate to be had – Codies should keep McRae's gaming legacy alive. Now we can reveal that, with the blessing of his family, Colin McRae's name is staying attached to the series – beginning with Colin McRae Dirt 2, due on PS3 in 2009.

"McRae was all about the speed, the excitement and the entertainment of rally driving. Even when we first worked with him over ten years ago, he captured a freedom and a spirit that enthralled rally fans," says Dirt's senior executive producer, Gavin

Raeburn. "Later his showmanship shone through in events such as the X Games, the Dakar Rally and the Race of Champions. He could do things with a car that no one else would and that's where we're taking the series with new events at the extreme edge of rally and autosport. It will be a great tribute to an incredible champion."

Inside track

The showmanship Raeburn mentions is a key new feature for Dirt 2. While ▶





the conventional rallying that's been the series' bread and butter is here and strong as ever, this will be the first McRae game to also feature events inspired by the X Games, an annual event where the focus is on outrageous action and pushing competitors to the brink - kind of like a real-life Motorstorm. That means events like Creek Trailblazer, an edge-of-control canyon race in Utah, Rawang Rally Run – a marathon set in the steamy rainforests of Malaysia - and Battersea Battle, a night-time rallycross event that takes place in South London with Battersea's iconic disused power station looming large in the background.

This authentic, contemporary theme has been applied across the game with the focus split between solo, multi-car and multi-class

■ Codies are so focused on making every event feel authentic that they've developed realistic promotional material, like this flyer here for South London's Battersea Battle. racing. Rally, rallycross, rally raid (point-to-point stages for up to eight competitors featuring heavy vehicles on obstacle-laden courses) and trailblazer (hill climb races with a descent stage tagged on) are the four event groupings already announced, all with corresponding online play. Codemasters promises more event types will follow, too.

Maximum McRae

"Rally has attracted new stars and a new style that makes it more vibrant and exciting than it's ever been before; it's right up there as a premium extreme sport, attracting fresh crowds and a new confident attitude," explains Raeburn. "Dirt 2 mirrors this new, exciting direction and, in a way, we will be throwing off some of the shackles and constraints that real-world rallying has to abide by. We're pitching players against the most spectacular and dangerous environments in the real world."











These new events are likely to be the biggest selling point for Dirt 2. but rest assured that the rock solid racing fundamentals that made it (and sister game Race Driver Grid) so strong remain in place. The game utilises the third generation of Codies' impressive Ego game engine, also used in its forthcoming ultra-harsh shooter Operation Flashpoint 2: Dragon Rising. Along with a new damage engine Raeburn promises "cars and tracks twice as detailed as those seen in Grid". The striking images shown here are 'targets' for the visual quality the team is aiming for. But based on Grid and the original Dirt, Codies don't make idle promises.



"It'll capture a charged race day atmosphere and deliver all the aggression and potential of the world's finest off-road vehicles." Gavin Raeburn Senior executive producer, Codemasters

As ever, those cars are a best-inclass collection of officially licensed rally vehicles and off-road treats, specifically selected to deliver aggressive, pacy racing. There are seven classes in all, with the *opening* drive being the Group N Subaru – the best car from the original Dirt. It's a smart way of making the point that the first game was just the start of something much bigger.

The untimely death of the man who gave this superb rally series its name – and which, ironically, helped to catapult Dirt to the number one spot in the charts in the weeks that followed – made 2007 a bittersweet year for the game's development team. If what we've seen of Dirt 2 so far is anything to by, 2009 should be an altogether brighter time, delivering a fitting legacy to Colin McRae in the form of yet another class-leading driving game.

Colin McRae's family will be launching a legacy site in his name soon. Visit colinmcrae.com for updates









1 FIFA 09



Need For Speed Undercover



B-1 Pro Evolution Soccer 2009



Resistance 2



____LittleBigPlanet



10-1 Smackdown vs Raw 2009



21 007: Quantum Of Solace



Guitar Hero
World Tour



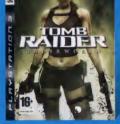
Far Cry 2



Fallout 3



Star Wars: The



014

10mb Raider Underworld



40-1 Sonic Unleashed



50-1 Grand Theft Auto IV



80-1 SingStar ABBA



100-1 Moto GP 0



Monopoly



What will be the PS3 Christmas #1?

COD: World At War a stick-on favourite for the top spot

The form book

Before Call Of Duty,
Need For Speed, and the
ever lasting cash cow that is
FIFA started dominating
the Christmas chart it was
Grand Theft Auto and – we
kid you not – Medal Of
Honor who ruled at
Yuletide G Ta San Andreas
and GTA Vice City were
respectively 2004 and
2002's Christmas number
ones, while Medal Of
Honor: Rising Sun took
the title back in 2003.

Feeling lucky? Us neither, but last year over £24,000 was staked with bookies Paddy Power on which game would be Christmas number one. The brilliant Call Of Duty 4 eventually took the title, so it's no surprise that the odds are on Activision's shooter series completing a festive double this year, with World At War the 3/1 favourite to be 2008's winner.

Betting on which song would top the festive chart once meant easy money for bookies, and an entire generation unable to shake terrifying childhood memories of Cliff Richard's Mistletoe And Wine, but a certain TV show has turned that market stale. "With The X Factor winner a shoe-in for number one in the music charts, punters now look for an alternative. The Christmas videogame market does the trick," explains Paddy Power's head of novelty betting, Will Byrne. "It's a market we proudly originally produced and one of our most popular."

Tomb fader

Byrne expects over £40,000 to be staked on the top spot this year, and given that Need For Speed topped the charts in both 2006 and 2005

(with Carbon and Most Wanted respectively) it's no surprise to see its latest edition, Undercover, rank third in the current odds. But there are surprises further down the list. Lara Croft seems to have lost much of her charm with punters – Tomb Raider Underworld's odds are a generous 33/1. And Sonic's fall from grace is also confirmed, with his odds a sizeable 40/1. Meanwhile, very much bringing up the rear, is Monopoly as the longest of 150/1 long shots.

For the latest PS3 chart odds in the build up to Christmas log onto paddypower.com.



Killzone 2 sees the ISA invading the lethal planet of Helghan.



■ The Helghast are smarter than your average enemy.

So, about that Killzone trailer then...

The doubters go suspiciously quiet as Killzone 2 shows graphics and gameplay to die for

Cast your mind back to May 2005, and how the initial euphoria over the Killzone 2 unveiling descended into bitter recriminations over whether the trailer was in-game (it wasn't) or used pre-rendered CG (it did). Since then, the row over 'target footage' – ie what a developer hopes it will be able to achieve – as a means to build hype for a game has become a stick used to beat Sony with. But while you chew over the ethics of that, allow us to offer this: the new build of Killzone 2 we're playing doesn't look as good as that trailer. It looks guite a bit better.

You can judge a game's graphics by how many people are drawn to the office TV when it first arrives. In this case, that meant everyone. We cooed over smoke plumes, marvelled at animation that was even slinkier than Sony's baseball champ, MLB 08: The Show, and gasped at the fanciest explosions we've ever seen. And we've seen a *lot* of explosions.

More tellingly, the gameplay has come on hugely. With pad in hand, the guns no longer buck like electrified cats, and the previously questionable Al has been replaced with enemies who value self-preservation and do stern work to winkle you out of cover. Niggles? Well, we'd still like the Helghast to take a couple less bullets before shuffling off their mutated mortal coils (it doesn't have quite the same punch as COD4 yet – but what does?), but the overall impression is if of a grittier, more cinematic experience than current sci-fi shooter fave, Resistance 2.

In the zone

What's also absolutely clear is that, in terms of polish, Killzone 2 is benefiting from the decision to move its release date to early 2009 in order to avoid clashing with Resistance 2 this Christmas. Excitingly, the extended development period has also meant Sony has been able to pass our feedback on to the team at Guerilla as they tweak and fine tune what's essentially already the finished game. Full preview next month.

Kilizone 2 will be released on 26 February. We'll have the exclusive review in issue 28, on sale 20 January.



What Shuhei Yoshida did next...

Seven months into the job, we catch up with PS3's software boss

On a recent trip to Tokyo we managed to grab some face time with Shuhei Yoshida, Phil Harrison's replacement as the president of Sony Computer Entertainment's worldwide studios. Now he's had a chance to settle in and redecorate the office, we spoke to him about what it's like to be responsible for all Sony's upcoming games, with the power to make or break them...

What does your job entail on a day-to-day basis?

016

I wake up in the morning at around 5.00-5.15 and go through emails. There's usually a bunch from US studios and I answer them. I then have Skype calls with the US people. In the day it's a bit easier. I deal with people in the headquarters, colleagues, and occasionally we have meetings with local Japanese studios. Also, I meet with our Japanese marketing group. Later in the day I start receiving emails from our European studios. Then more calls and that's the day.

You cancelled Eight Days and The Getaway...

A long time ago! (Laughs)

...so what is the decision-making process that leads to the 'It's over' moment?

When we make decisions that affect a project, it comes from other people from the studios, actually. They work towards a target, a particular milestone and in many cases they actually come to us saying, 'This isn't working, we have to do something. Cancelling a title is tough on us. We begin a lot of projects that we never finish. We have to, otherwise we're not trying anything new. So we start more projects than we need or want and we have milestones and dates where we evaluate things.

How much work goes into a project before you say yes or no? We have several different checkpoints to make that decision. We start the main project at a concept stage. When the core idea is being developed the studio has many different ideas to put into the initial development. This happens before I even get a chance to look at it. It's mostly ideas on paper: sketches and graphics – a very small investment of the company's time. So we flesh out a concept to make sure the team is making something special, but try to narrow down the actual content when we start focus-testing the code. At the end of this stage, we make our decision.

When you make a game, is it purely a business decision or do you consider its artistic worth? We are changing, and the whole industry is changing. The budget for making games was manageable on PS2. We used to spend somewhere between five and ten million dollars per title but now, on PS3, the industry is spending 20 to 30 million dollars [per game], and sometimes even more. That means the decision we make at an early stage about how much money we invest is really about the potential for recouping that investment. We really have to look beyond the team's personal feelings, for the potential of the product. So it involves more people from the business side – marketing people – to talk to, to show our concepts and prototypes and get serious feedback. This includes what they think about how titles might do in their market because we have marketing groups covering four regions. So we take that input into consideration when we make the final decision whether to continue developing a title.

Do you agree with [former SCE president] Phil Harrison's vision for the future of PS3, in which gaming isn't limited by the disc and there isn't a boundary between physical and downloadable media?

Yes, of course I do. I was originally part of his management group, I was responsible for the US studios and he was directing my studio and the worldwide studios, so we worked together. We tried to be agents of change in that we started something that really showed the way, like LittleBigPlanet. So that was our strategy when we started to work on PS3. We are starting to see more and more examples of what we were just talking about - getting people consistently more and more involved - and LittleBigPlanet is a big example. This game is a very smart use of the network and it will inspire many more developers to see what they can do. A smaller example is SingStar and people's singing performances - it's fun to watch those videos. So that's the kind of thing we expect all our studios to look at – because the network connection is part of the console, they should look at how they can use it.

Got questions for Shuhei Yoshida? Send them to opm@futurenet.com and we'll ask him next time.

Looking ahead

Asking Yoshida to peer into his crystal ball, he says community play and casual gaming both loom even larger in PS3's future. "I think that the big trends [will continue to grow]." he explains. "One is what we've talked about: the user-created content and the expansion of the market into more casual gaming. We've had our ccesses with games like SingStar and EyeToy on PS2 which we are bringing to PS3. That market will













Why do these stars all sound identical?

'Cause they're all voiced by Nolan North, who says work is underway on Uncharted and Assassin's Creed sequels



Actor bio

"Dude, the Prince sounds exactly like Nathan Drake." This was our first reaction on playing Prince Of Persia for this month's exclusive review. "It can't be the same guy, can it?" So we asked Ubisoft Montreal and they told us that, yes, it is the same guy, and his name is Nolan North.

It turns out North has been really busy, because as well as starring in two of PS3's biggest games - three, if you count his role as Desmond, Altair's modern day descendant in Assassin's Creed - he was also in COD2, God Of War, Resistance and MGS4. So how did he become the most wanted voice on PlayStation?

"Uncharted was a big deal because it was one of the first games where I'm not putting on a voice," he explains on the phone from Los Angeles, while sounding exactly like Nathan Drake. He landed the role after years of smaller parts where he'd usually be putting on an accent – "I'm screaming

like a Brit or I'm a Frenchman" - and ad-libbed through the motion capture sessions. The result was a character close to Nolan himself, which can make for difficult viewing. "When I watch someone playing it, I find myself going, 'Ngh, don't jump, I'll never make that!' It's surreal.'

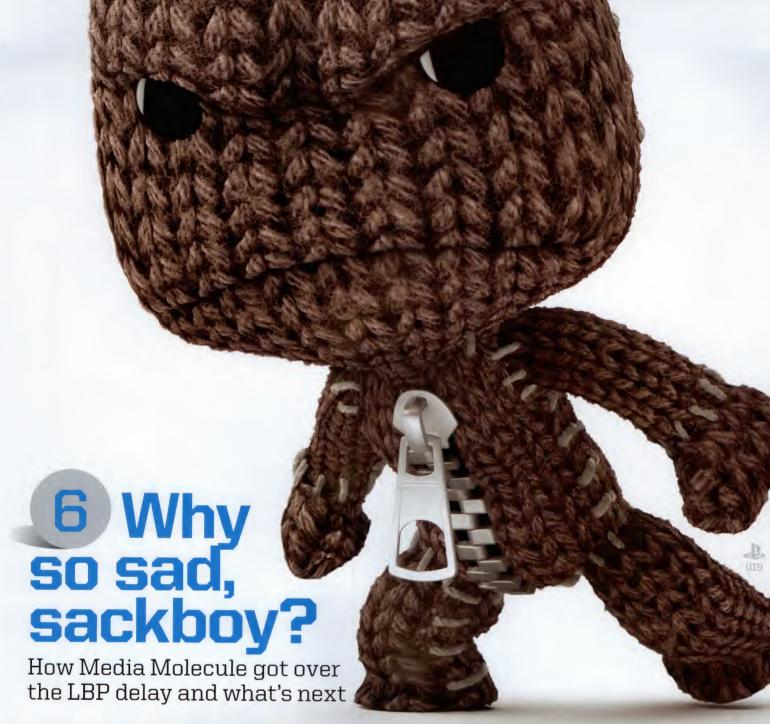
Royal appointment

The Persia role came about coincidentally. North played Raphael in the recent Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles movie, and the same role in the Ubisoft game of the film. This led to his part in Ubisoft's Assassin's Creed, and by the time Persia came around he knew the team well. "When they hired me I asked, 'What kind of voice are we doing?' They said, 'We just want your voice.' And it's the same as Nathan Drake."

So there's nothing in his contract about not using the voice for other games? "I hope not because that's my voice!" North jokes. And though there's been some teasing from Uncharted dev Naughty Dog - "Prince Of Persia! They stole our everyman" - it hasn't affected his standing with either studio. North confirms that he's working on both a new Uncharted game - "it's taking up quite a bit of time" - and some extra bits for POP, presumably for DLC. He also lets slip that "Assassin's Creed is going to be great - they're doing another one soon". Is he in it? "I'd better be! I really enjoyed doing that first one.

So what does he reckon makes a hit game? "If you look at most games that have been big hits, I guarantee you they're written really well. Obviously the company has to get the gameplay right and make it look beautiful, but the ones that really seem to hold up, usually just have a great story." To see how Persia holds up, turn to page 84.

We'll be bringing you more info on the highly anticipated follow-up to Uncharted: Drake's Fortune soon.



After the unfortunate but mercifully brief delay, LittleBigPlanet is finally enjoying the limelight. In the aftermath of the launch, we spoke to developer Media Molecule, who told us the game finally hitting the streets caused scenes of wild celebration in the office. "There was a bottle or 12 of champagne," says Dave Smith, technical director. "After that it all became a bit of a blur."

Thousands of lucky players had already sampled the game as part of its pre-release beta trial, but for many more the full release in early November was their first taste of sackcloth. Either way, the response has been positive, proactive and often downright obsessive, with fans rapidly crafting and publishing their own levels. There are so many users

creating so many worlds that Smith refused to be pinned down on the ones that he's hearted. "My favourite level changes on a daily basis," he explains. "There are whole categories of levels that appear from time to time that we never thought of."

Future proof

Just because fans are creating the content now, Smith and his team aren't ready to down tools. Media Molecule is committed to supporting the game for the foreseeable future. and promises lots more sackboy fun to come. The game will get free automatic updates, with tweaks to the tools and even new parts. "In some ways, we're still at the start of the LittleBigPlanet project,' says Smith. "When you go back into the game, you

shouldn't be surprised to see improvements and new features to play with and improve the experience." And there will be a wealth of downloadable content too, like the Snake and Sephiroth costumes we unveiled last month. The team will be watching the response to these items with interest. "We don't exactly know yet exactly what the community wants from downloadable content, so the response to our first wave of DLC will be really interesting."

Media Molecule recently revealed it's already working on a sequel, but that doesn't seem to be halting its plans to make LittleBigPlanet even bigger and better. "We're in this for the long haul," promises Smith.

Don't forget to vote for LBP in our Game Of The Year poll see p21 - and check out our exclusive interview on p62.

Levels of love

Website ps3attitude.com asked Media Molecule's main man Alex Evans about his favourite user-created levels and these were his top five levels so far. Go try 'em! 1. No Surprises by HappyBivouac 2. Sackworld by ??? 3. The Horror of '44 by Foil 4. The House Of Fun by Jeff, one of Media Molecule's QA team. 5. Any thing by a gamer called Geo



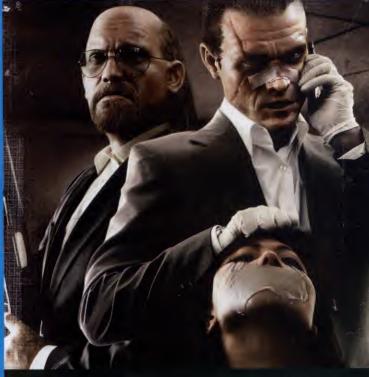




Burnout Paradise

"Burnout has evolved based on the telemetry data we study every day. Thus we retune and reshape the game based on feedback from real players. This hasn't happened before with Sony consoles. Just like PS3 itself, the game is evolving with each new update."

Alex Ward, Creative director, Criterion Games, on how DLC is changing 'definitive' review scores.



Kane & Lynch Dead Men

"Negative criticism has to be filtered carefully before you act on it. Which parts should we fix to make the game better for the player and which parts should we fix to get better reviews? They're not always the same, but unfortunately almost as important.

Jens-Peter Kurup Director on Kane & Lynch on how negative criticism affects future projects.



7) Developers vs

Insiders reveal what it's like to have their babies rated

Critical mass

Launched in 2001, Metacritic.com creates aggregate 'metascores' out of 100 (culled from print and internet reviews) for Sports president Feter Moore says, "I'm very proud of the fact that this year, we had our best Metacritic rating in three years," it's not empty talk

At this time of year, with review scores swirling around like Frank Capra snow, it's easy to forget the human cost of the festive bottleneck of game releases. No developer spends two years sweating away on the coding floor with their hopes pinned on a so-so aggregate score on Metacritic. Still, for every benchmarksplintering LittleBigPlanet or Bioshock there's a spectacularly average Turok, Lair or Kane & Lynch: Dead Men. Stellar, atrocious or (arguably worst of all) just plain forgettable, how does it feel for devs when their games are finally rated?

One man who knows what it's like to work on a game that flies below the critical heights predicted for it is Jens-Peter Kurup, director on lo 'Hitman' Interactive's Kane & Lynch. Speaking to our sister site Games Radar recently, he said, "Even though we received nice scores in a lot of the mainstream and lifestyle press, the gaming press started to give it mediocre scores, and we knew that we wouldn't hit our Metacritic mark. That felt confusing and unfulfilling."

But are review scores ever really that much of a surprise? After all, as a developer, you know the game better

than anyone, right? "When you're this close to a project it does become difficult to be wholly objective," says Arne Meyer, senior manager of marketing communications at Uncharted dev. Naughty Dog, "but it isn't impossible to take a step back and consider the project from a broader point of view." It's a feeling echoed by an anonymous source whose last job was working on a shooter series that got canned after a disappointing PS3 outing. "Everyone plays games, so you can tell where you are in the hierarchy of what's good and what's bad," he says, before



reviews...

adding ominously, "but you don't ever really voice your opinion." Still, even when you suspect your latest project is something special, it doesn't make anticipating scores any easier. Gavin Raeburn, executive producer on Race Driver Grid, likens it to "waiting for exam results," adding, "You just never know how it'll be received by critics."

Dead Men walking

So do our experts believe anything should be done to make the reviews process fairer? There's no consensus, but most feel the longer a reviewer plays a game, the more accurate the final verdict. As Criterion's creative director Alex Ward says, "I think it's important for reviewers to live with a

game for a while. It's amazing how many games don't always win you over in the first play."

Kurup, meanwhile, is in favour of reviews that feature multiple points of view. "[I'm] not sure it provokes a fairer review, but it'll carry different opinions at least." Ultimately, as the announcement of sequels to Kane & Lynch and Turok demonstrates, it's sales, not reviews, that decide a game's fate. And if a game tanks there's always the next project. As our secret source says: "You roll with the punches and think, 'well, next time we'll get there.' You can't always win." Seriously, though, Turok 2?

How important are review scores in your decision to buy a game? Let us know at opm@futurenet.com.

Game Of The Year '08

It's your last chance to vote

Last issue we asked you to vote for your favourite game of the last 12 months. If you still haven't done so time is running out. In issue 28 of OPM, out on 20 January 2009, we'll be unveiling what the country's finest gaming minds (that's you) think was the best game of 2008. And if you want your vote to count, then you'd best get emailing before the closing date of 31 December.

Show some love

This year we've expanded the competition (which was won by Call Of Duty 4: Modern Warfare in 2007) to include PSP and PSN categories as well as PS3. All we need you to do is email us your top three games in each category. And if you'd like to appear in the feature. send us a snappy soundbite about why you chose what, along with your mugshot. So if you think PES 2009 deserves to be Champion of PS3, tell us why. If you've been unable to stop playing Pixeljunk Monsters on PSN (join the club), this is your chance to sing its praises. And if you're still hooked on International Athletics on PSP... feel free to forward the email address below on to your therapist to vote on your behalf.

Please send all your votes to opm@futurenet.com with the subject line 'GOTY Awards' (otherwise they can't be counted). Remember, we'll be publishing the best reader contributions, so it's also a great opportunity to get your big words and movie star cheekbones into OPM. Happy voting.



Nail hairpin bends

If there is a corner that doesn't deserve its reputation, it's the hairpin. Once you crack them they're an excellent opportunity to make up crucial time on the opposition. By braking later than for other corners and delaying the turn into the corner (but steer more sharply when you do turn) you end up with a straighter – and faster – exit line.



Learn to love the brakes

Anyone can be fast in a straight line. The thing that will make you quick around a lap is getting through the corners quickly. So spend time finding the latest point at which you can (smoothly but swiftly) apply the brakes and still make the apex on the corner. Once you've found it use a visual reference (such as a fence or hoarding) for the braking zone.

Embrace manual gears Be smooth No one wants to make life harder than it needs to This doesn't mean offering your partner champagne while reciting Baudelaire. be, but there's good reason to opt for a manual transmission in games - not least the ability to Rather, treat the joypad as though you're have better control over the braking and performing brain surgery, with delicate yet acceleration phases of a circuit. Practise purposeful steering, accelerator and brake input. This is crucial if you're playing a driving sim where by pretending to change gears while the handling model reflects any abruptness - often using an automatic gearbox in order to get used to the timing. resulting in an intimate Armco encounter. Look ahead Sounds obvious, but the majority of virtual racers fail to look far enough ahead when driving. Just as in real life, fixing your gaze sufficiently into the distance ensures better positioning of your car as you navigate the circuit because you naturally adapt the trajectory to get to where you're looking. This one takes a while until it's second nature, but the effort is worth it. Driving distraction Still not worked out what to get the old man for Christmas? The Driving Games Manual is out now, published by Haynes, with an RRP of £19.99.





OutRun," says Sanches, who lists

Race Driver Grid, Burnout Paradise

and Wipeout HD among his current

PS3 track favourites, and he's most

looking forward to what Codemasters

about when to downshift. João Diniz

author of The Driving Games Manual,

and he's been playing racers since the

'70s and spent seven years reviewing

Sanches is not most of us. He's the

PlayStation, Official Magazine UK

Are you a racing savant? Think you've got better track

asked the racing phenom for six ways

to shave seconds off the lap time in

any driving game...

tips? Let us know at opm@futurenet.



Are LittleBigPlanet levels too hard to build?

Our artistes get their berets in a twist over LBP's Create mode



Yes Says OPM's easily baffled lover of instant fun, Rachel Penny

The problems all started with Professor Jelly. As soon as I got my hands on LittleBigPlanet I set about constructing a magnificent aquatic-themed level, and my jellyfish was going to be its crowning glory. He was constructed from glass, and finished off with string tendrils capped by shiny glass ends. I put in the brain, gave him eyes then exited my Popit menu. Smash! The whole thing crashed down onto the floor,

bits dissolving, and strings snapping everywhere. That's when I realised that it's not enough to make pretty shapes in LBP – I was going to have to make a 'something' for him to stick to, and a way to make him move, and that was going to involve incredibly complicated things like pistons, switches and, urgh, the considered application of actual physics.

Planning permission

It's all very well making clever tools so creative savants can slave away for days building calculators and rollercoasters. but what about the rest of us? It's too easy to make mistakes, and too hard to rectify them, so a crushing sense of inadequacy is always just around the sticker-covered corner. Even the simplest stuff needs gluing and supporting and refining. and, if you ask me, that coasts dangerously close to feeling like actual work. You'll agree with me the first time you have a problem with layers, or rockets, or when you put the wrong sort of

tayers, or rockets, or when you put the wrong sort of brain in your cardboard unicorn, or your mate plays your new level and instantly breaks it. Maybe some people enjoy that bitter tang of failure, but I'm not one of them.

Reckon LBP's Create mode is a bit of a faff?
Tell us why with a mail to opm@futurenet.com.



Says OPM's 'Kubrickian' platforming auteur, Tim Clark

Here's what LittleBigPlanet can't do. It can't make you creative, or give you patience, or turn you into the new Miyamoto any more than handing you a DV camera and the keys to an edit suite will turn you into the new Fincher. What it can do – aside from being a brilliant platformer in its own right, with an endless supply of free new levels – is provide you with tools that are so simple and flexible that you'll be able to build pretty much

anything that bubbles up in you brain. But it won't be easy and i won't be quick. Making something brilliant and worthwhile never is, with the possible exception of babies.

Making magic

I can't help but think that the same internet blowhards complaining that it takes too much work to make a decent level would have complained even harder if Media Molecule had delivered dumbed down tools. People who get what LBP is doing know that the creative process itself is where the fun is but equally that it's a different kind of play. It took two solid nights to make a level I was happy with, but it was as intense an experience as I've had with any game on PS3 so far – a rush

triumpns,
cataclysmic messups and surprising
breakthroughs.
And then
there's the
feeling
when you
finally publish
your level and
people start
playing it. It's just,
well... Wow. So,
designing LBP levels,
then: worse than
sex, but
scientifically

better than just about everything else. It's time to LittleBigManUp.

Do you think the people moaning about LBP are just talentless? Mail opm@futurenet.com

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Agenda

Write stuff

Developers are waking up to the value of good writing – but can a story make or break a game?

PlayStation news, views, happenings and people...

28 Informer

Hot game issues investigated by OPM's crack team.

30 Culture

The PlayStation people who make gaming great.

32 Personal

Hot opinion from those in the know.

33 **Tech**Shiny things you can't live without.

34 Sony New kit beamed

down from the Sony mothership.

38 Events
Your gamers
quide to the

"You wouldn't employ a writer to build your texture map. Why would you employ a programmer to write your story? It's absurd." So says Antony Johnston, the writer brought in to hammer Dead Space's story into its final grisly form. Johnston's frustration reflects the fact that up until the last few years, you could take nearly any major game release and find ropey dialogue, daft characterisation

dialogue, daft characterisation and clichés galore. But why have games resisted good writing for so long?

"Because it's actually pretty damn hard to do right," says Rhianna Pratchett (right), whose writing credits include Heavenly Sword. Overlord and, most recently, Mirror's Edge. "The needs of narrative and the needs of gameplay rarely align, so you've got an uphill struggle on your hands, right from the off. This is especially so if narrative is the last thing addressed. You can be left with a situation where a large amount of the gameplay, levels, characters and environments have been designed without much narrative in mind. In those situations story can't be properly embedded in a game because no real space has been created for it. This can lead to the kind of pouring-on-top feel of so many game stories, like a kind of narrative custard.

Some kind of friction is inevitable – games are interactive and writers are accustomed to producing something more linear – but the simplest of narrative devices come apart as soon as you put your story in the hands of a

gamer, as one of Bioshock's writers, Susan O'Connor, explains. "Games defy some of the most basic foundations of storytelling: how do you create needs or flaws in characters and not frustrate players? Can you create true points of no return, or will gamers just

execute a redo and get it 'right'? You can blue-sky story concepts all day long, but in the end, the question is: 'Will it work in the game?'"

Long division

"Historically, writers are often the last people brought on board," says Johnston. "It's like, 'Okay, we've finished the game, now what's our story?' The results are predictably bad and people come to think writing doesn't matter. It may not be important to a few games, but to most it's a huge asset."

But things are changing. With well-written games like Bioshock and Portal doing big numbers, developers are waking up to the value of professional writers on a project. "Trouble is, most people aren't really sure how to use a writer," says Pratchett. "In many cases the writers aren't sure themselves. It's a steep learning curve with no shortcuts."

However, all three writers are unanimous as to how developers can improve the mesh between good narrative and game design: "Bring a writer in early and work with them to develop your concepts and design, and you can lift a game from mediocrity to brilliance," says Johnston. "We want to make good games too, you know."

And the wrong stuff

Off-cuts from videogame writing's hall of shame

Bad dialoque

It's not just the zombies that stink in Resident Evil. "Jill, here's a lock pick," says Barry Burton in one of many clunky exchanges. "It might come in handy if you, the master of unlocking, take it with you." Magnificently awful.

Unnecessary story

Time Crisis 4 would have been a much better game if it had just let you blast away in peace. Namco disagreed, constantly interrupting the action to explain why you were being assaulted by swarms of nano-beetles. Do. Not. Care.

Overwritten

Final Fantasy X remains an object lesson in overwrought scriptwriting, not least because it was the first FF to be voiced by American actors. As Harrison Ford told George Lucas, "You can write this sh*t, but you sure can't say it."



RUMOUR MACHINE Insider whispers

APB, Realtime Vorlds' exciting new cops vs robbers MMO actioner is still



The next instalment of stealth classic Splinter Cell, working title Conviction, will be coming to PS3 after all.



underworld

poem depicting a journey through the Work on Metal Gear Solid 5 has

begun with a new hero in Sony Snake's place. is readving a Wiimote-style controller. It will use the PlayStation Eye to track gamers' movements.



word is that it will be three years

Staff working on the 'ultra real' Steven Spielberg/ EA project (codenamed LMNO) have been laid off.



How sackboy took over the world

LBP inspires fan art and a marriage proposal

It's no surprise given sackboy's craft origins that he has a growing army of crocheted, knitted and stitched doppelgangers. But that's only the beginning – artists have been reinterpreting LittleBigPlanet's hero in paint, pen, butter icing, and paper. One fan has even spawned a population of sackboys in virtual world, Second Life.

But by far our favourite spin-off to date is Stuart Brothers' creation – an LBP beta level designed to ask his girlfriend Jennifer to marry him. As well as popping the question – "There are probably easier ways of spelling it out but I liked the idea of 'carving' the letters out of wood!" says Stuart – the level features a heart-shaped balloon ride and a 'just married' car made from a bottle of bubbly. See it at snipurl.com/4j731. Oh, and she said 'yes' – it seems nobody can resist sackboy's button-eyed charm.



1Stuart Brothers proposes with sackboy's help. 2Stefilini's LittleBigCake. 3 EnterMeun gives sackboy manga attitude. 4 Love the zip on Luigi Vercotti's effort. 5 This one was made by the mum of a Media Molecule staffer. 6 Fear And Loathing In LBP. 7 World domination awaits. 8 Oxoc has taken sackboy out of LBP and into Second Life.





School of rock

Wait, his parents let him do what?

16-year-old Blake Peebles is tired of all the bad PR, and wants to put the story straight. "90% of the people who hear the story give negative reactions because most of them think I dropped out of school completely and that it was just for Guitar Hero."

It's true that Peebles left school to concentrate on becoming a professional gamer, but only after he had convinced his parents to hire a tutor to teach him at home. It took them a while to warm to the idea though. "When I first asked them at 14 they just thought it was the same thing any kid my age would want to do. They thought it was a joke basically."

Eventually Peebles proved his dedication, practising in his spare time and entering competitions, and his parents agreed to support his decision. "I started competing about a month after Guitar Hero III came out and I only lost the first tournament I attended," he told us. So far his six hours of practice a day at Rock Band and Guitar Hero have won him \$1,000 in prizes, and the admiration of all his mates. "All of my guy friends think it is the coolest thing ever." At this point we feel duty-bound to point out those same friends have probably made a lot more dollar flipping burgers.

WHO SAID THAT? V.I.P. quotes

"I'm coming to Pain!
And it hurts so good!"
The Hoff is set to
fly in the PSN
hurt-a-thon's
new Movie
Studio level.

"It's rare that within five seconds of starting you fall in love with a bit of software." Atari president **Phil Harrison** St.BP.

"We should consider some sort of Japan Alliance." Square Enix

boss **Yoichi Wada's** eyes up
the West's
cash-rich
developers.

"Console-isation isn't about dumbing down features." **Jean-Francois Dugas**, Deus Ex 3's lead designer, talks our language.

OPM HOT

What makes a game scary?





Richard Lemarchand Co-lead game designer, Naughty Dog

"The key word is anticipation – big scares are payoffs for having built a sense of dread in the player, usually by using audio and the ambient environment."



Jacob Winkoff
Load deelgner, Blue
Omega Forest Morgani

"A horror game designer has to make sure that the player is going to be surprised, and that there is absolutely nothing they can do about it."



Barbara Gamlen
International PR

"Atmosphere. I grew up reading Lovecraft, so what scares me most is the unknown, the possibility of what's in the darkness."



Jason Avent Game director, Black Rock Studios

"It depends on how it's scary.
Pure is scary-exciting. When
you're in the groove, you're
going so fast that everything on
the track becomes a hazard."





Stop the killing

Leon Hurley explains why he's proud to be a PlayStation pacifist

I am cursed by conscience. Most gamers are able to gun down waves of zombies/Nazis/robosexvampires without so much as a flicker of self-doubt. But in any game featuring moral choice, I go out of my way not to hurt anyone. It's starting to get embarrassing.

Case in point: Deus Ex on PS2 was a game filled with guns, biomechanical augmentations and an endless stream of victims to massacre. I played through the whole thing hitting people

with a stick. A stick! Partly because I thought the game would reward me for being nice – as all stories about homicidal secret agents obviously should. And also because I felt like I was proving a point: not killing imaginary bad men somehow made me better than them.



By the end of the game I was like a weathered cop ready for retirement, taking pride in the fact that I'd never used my gun. I was saving the world my way; a kind of cyborg pacifist.

 $unarmed.\ I\ never\ felt\ right\ about\ capping\ them.$

There is a perverse logic to it all. I might have killed hundreds of Liberty City's finest, run over countless pedestrians and gutshot anyone who touched my car in GTA IV. But when it came to the people you could *choose* to execute, I let them all go. Not because they might turn up later but because it felt like the right thing to do. In Oblivion I went out of my way to avoid killing, boosting my invisibility and paralysing magic so much that I



"In one mission, my need not to kill a prisoner ended with 60-odd cultists dead."

There was an odd sense of power too, because ripped with bio-mech augmentations and enhancements, I could have whacked them a hundred times over. I simply chose not to. They lived because I let them. When I did kill, however, I felt like I'd failed. One particularly stubborn guard patrolled a long walkway and there was no way to sneak up unseen, meaning I had to pop him with a sniper rifle. His fault, essentially.

This odd sense of morality has haunted me all my gaming life. In the original Syphon Filter there's a section where you have to kill scientists making biological weapons. The thing is, they're not balaclava-wearing terrorists who are shooting at you, these guys are on their knees, hands on heads, crying 'Don't shoot me, I'm

wielded god-like power simply so I didn't have to fight. It didn't always go to plan. During one mission posing as a cultist, my stubborn decision not kill a prisoner when my hand was forced ended up with 60-odd cult members slaughtered instead. You might call it a moral victory.

Truth is, I'm not always good. It depends on the game – take Hitman, for example. I will drop someone in a heartbeat if they display the slightest hint of suspicion towards my six foot, immaculately dressed, bald Caucasian Triad. It's a different context. I'm meant to be a ruthlessly efficient killer and I aim to please. It's the games that let *me* decide that cause problems. The fact that I can be bad with no fear of repercussion always makes it more important that I'm not.

MY GUILTY PLEASURE



Tim Clark isn't playing fair with **Madden NFL 09**

I never lose at Madden. Not because I'm good at it, but because I decided to only play on the rookie difficulty level. Going back to the series for the first time since the Mega Drive era, there didn't seem much point in playing it 'properly'. All I wanted was to throw long bombs, smash through the line of scrimmage and run in a long, unanswered string of TDs. And that's exactly what the rookie setting gives me. Defending is just as easy; I just sit back and let the CPU take the strain. My boys will most likely turn the ball over without me having to press a single button. (Other than the one that confirms that, yes actually, I would like to use fat boy's recommended play thanks.]





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Sony Reader



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firebox.com



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Perfect8 Force **Speakers**

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Prices and availability of products are all correct at time of going to press

Sony DSLR A900

Meet the camera that's so powerful it probably *does* capture its subjects' souls



62089 sonystyle.co.uk

In a nutshell

Considering the A900's intimidating specs, the first question you need to ask yourself is whether you and your loved ones are actually attractive enough to want this camera's unflinching gaze trained on you in the first place. The design may be old-skool SLR but the 24.6 megapixel photos it takes are so brutally detailed that it could take hours of Photoshop work just to stomach the results.

What's so special?

Hewn from a solid block of high-end functionality, the camera combines a 35mm sensor (incredible detail), and two BIONZ image processing engines (powerful and fast) with the latest SteadyShot image stabilisation technology, to virtually eliminate the visual 'noise' that still tends to mark digital photography as the inferior upstart brother of traditional printed snaps.



Tell me more

Short of critiquing your shots – 'What? Another sunrise? Have those feelings come back?' – the A900 takes pretty much all the pain out of photography: a newly developed autofocus system tracks moving subjects like a jealous lover, image previews enable you to fine-tune a host of parameters before going for a snap; while its 3" Xtra Fine LCD screen with quick-navigation menu means there's no excuse for missing the exact moment your 'muse' spots you from across the shopping centre and starts dialling 999.



Sensor

The 35mm Exmor CMOS sensor – the same size as traditional chemical film – has over 6,000 analog/digital convertors instead of the usual one, meaning light is turned into a virtually 'noise'-free digital signal at a dizzying speed. This also means the A900 can cope with high-precision wide-angle lenses without the drop-off in image quality that ordinarily comes with the subsequent hike in data hitting the sensor.

Output

Wisely opling not to try and serve foie gras through a garden hose, the A900's HDMI connection means you can transfer your 24.6 megapixel works of Rankin-shaming genius straight to a hi-def TV with no loss of quality. In fact, use the camera's Photo TV HD mode and, by tweaking sharpness, gradation and colour you'll get image quality on a par with printed photography.









PLAYSTATION TOP 10 CHARTS

This month's heroes and zeroes

▲Up ▼ Down ● Non mover + New entry

PS3

- l 🛉 Fallout3
- Far Cry 2
- 3 V FIFA 09
- 4 V PES 2009
- 5 🛊 007 Quantum Of Solace
- 6 Midnight Club Los Angeles
- **7** ▼ Saints Row 2
- B V Dead Space
- 9 V Grand Theft Auto IV
- **10** ▼ Moto GP 08

Source chart-track.co.uk

PS2

- 1 + PES 2009
- 2 V FIFA 09
- 3 V Lego Batman
- 4 + 007 Quantum Of Solace
- 5 V Star Wars The Force Unleashed
- **6** ▼ SingStar Boy Bands vs Girl Bands
- 7 🕈 Manhunt 2
- 8 V The Golden Compass
- Ben 10 Protector Of The Earth
- 10 V The Simpsons Game

Source chart-track.co.uk

PSP

- 1 FIFA 09
- 2 Lego Batman
- 3 🔺 Midnight Club LA Remix
- 4 ▼ Star Wars The Force Unleashed
- 5 🛕 Lego Indiana Jones The Original Adventures
- 6 A Tiger Woods PGA Tour 09
- 7 Manhunta
- 8 ▼ Crisis Core FFVII
- A Star Ocean First Departure
- **10** ▼ Wall-E

Source **chart-track.co.uk**







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The PlayStation entertainment plan

Never spend a moment unfulfilled with our monthly guide

Monday

Tuesday

Wednesday

Thursday

Friday Saturday 28

Sunday

PlayStation

NOV 25

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Britrock-lite stalwarts

Feeder bust out their big hits land stuff from their new album Silent House, Edinburgh

Prince Of Persia swings onto PS3 today Win a copy, signed art a PS3 and a 40" HDTV on the next page

30

to the limit as they travel across the capital to face Chelsea at Stamford Bridge

DEC OL

A brilliant, poignant final performance from Heath Ledger is just one highlight of Batman flick The Dark Knight - out on Blu-ray today. thedarkknight.



10



12

05

Based on a kids story in which reading a cursed book out loud conjures its contents in the real word, Inkheart

20

14

Randy Orton, Chris Jericho and Triple H look to see out 2008 with a bang in WWE's final pay per view of the year, Armageddon, live on Sky Box Office.



Strip show

Expect inspired rambling and killer heels as 'action transvestite' stand up Eddie Izzard's Stripped tour plays London's Lyric Theatre. eddieizzard.com

23 December Issue 27 on sale. Subscribe now on page 58.





Reminisce about the happy days when Stereophonics could pen a decent tune, as their greatest hits tour comes to London's 02 Arena.

Vienry overdraft

21









E YEARS

This month we visit OPS2 #41

Trashy plastic-faced girls with lurid painted out windows, but the cover of exclusive review of The Sims Bustin' Out. 'Almost too much like real life.' we was 'oowee-woowee' would die penniless and alone. It scored 8/10.

headline 'Half-Life 2 for PS2?' [the story was actually about political FPS Cold Winter), and rather more solid info on the hugely anticipated PSP. We

Previews started with a mostly indifferent hands-on with Headhunter: Redemption, although we did enjoy that heroine Leeza X was lithe like 'a hands-on with 'meh' tie-in Terminator 3: Rise Of The Machines and took a terrified alimpse at Forbidden Siren.

the bloody motoring of Roadkill ('shatteringly unoriginal') and cop nonsense True Crime: Streets Of LA and car-crash awfulness'). They both

EyeToy: Groove, Pop Idol, Legacy Of Kain: Defiance, Secret Weapons Over Normandy, Harry Potter: Quidditch World Cup, whatever WWE game they. shunted out that year and Need For Speed: Underground, which was the ssue's top scorer with 9/10.



Play Persia in HD

Win POP, signed art, a PS3 and a 40" HDTV

Christmas is coming, and we're here to help fill your lacy stocking. Forget chocolate coins that taste of soap, though. To celebrate the release of Prince Of Persia on PS3 we're giving you the chance to get your hands on a 40" JVC HDTV. perfect for catching every gravity-defying wall run and heroic leap. If that wasn't enough there's a PS3, copy of the game and some extra special signed artwork up for grabs too. To be in with a shot, answer the following question correctly:

Who will play the role of the Prince in the new Prince Of Persia: The Sands Of Time movie?

A MARK WAHLBERG B JAKE GYLLENHAAL CJACK BLACK

Text using the word 'Prince' followed by a space, then your answer A, B or C followed by a space, then your name or address to 87474. Or enter at futurecomps.co.uk/26pop. Winners will be picked at random from all correct entries. Closing date 23.12.08

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MINUTE

Games to play when the boss isn't looking



Meat boy

Is this simple but addictive platformer the greatest love story ever told? Since you're a lump of bleeding meat out to rescue a lover made from plasters, by navigating structures, that'll be a 'no'. snipurl.com/48jdo



Microbe Kombat

Usually germs just lead to sniffles, the runs and viral here there's nothing but Flow-style action as you steer your microbe around. unleashing unicellular whupass on proteins. snipurl.com/48jr7



Duck: Think Outside The Flock

Sense fowl play? That'll be this package of unique puzzles, all masterfully constructed with a selection of rubber ducks. There are you to figure things out snipurl.com/48jyh

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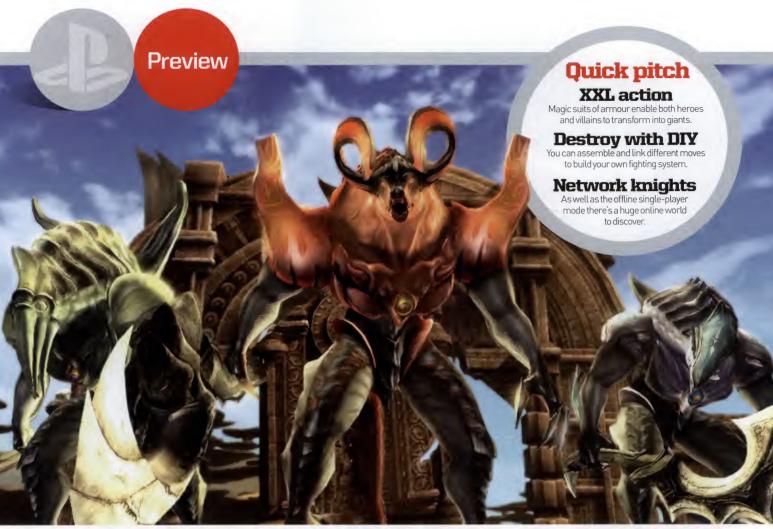




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Hot Developer Format PS3 ETA Spring 2009 Pub Sony Dev Level 5

White Knight Chronicles

△ Big ○ Man ⊗ JRPG ○ Networked

ould it be that Final Fantasy has new footage from the

ould it be that Final Fantasy has finally met its match? Level 5 has always produced brilliant RPGs (Dragon Quest: Journey Of The Cursed King and Rogue Galaxy) but its cartoony art style always made the developer feel a little lightweight compared to FF's epic fantasy vistas. This time, however, it's ditched the primary colours and has gone for a realistic world: a lush mix of pastoral fields and massive castles.

Most importantly, at the Tokyo Game Show, we saw a stunning barrage of new footage from the game, including a massive flying ship that looked like a Baroque gold bus with wings swooping through the clouds, a beautiful coastal walled city and a group of dart-like fighter craft flying at incredible speeds through narrow canyons. The mix of fantasy and technology combined with the ambitious production values and art style can only mean that Level 5 has its sights set firmly on Square-Enix's RPG crown.

But the lavish environments and

phantasmagorical creatures will mean nothing if there isn't a meaty combat system – something that'll keep the hardcore stat-heads happy, without shutting out newcomers. Level 5's solution is something that should keep both camps happy: a fighting setup you build yourself. There game uses a Battle System screen that has a series of function slots into which you drop various commands – attacks, magic spells and so on. You then link these individual actions together to create combos, and craft your own style.

5 good reasons Why White Knight Chronicles will beat Final Fantasy XIII

It's online
You can quest online
with up to three
other players. Items,
experience and
cash you unlock are
transferable between
on and offline games.

It's your battle
Whether you prefer
to use magic or
swordplay, you
can link together
hundreds of moves
to create your own
combat system.

It's got real character
You can create a custom avatar that fights alongside the hero offline but becomes the main character online.

It's tactical
You might be fighting monsters the size of houses but they all have exploitable weaknesses you can abuse in order to take them down.

It's huge
Level 5 delayed
White Knight from
the PS3 launch so
it wouldn't have to
skimp on length.
Expect 100+ hours

of gameplay.



▲ The White Knight is a huge and heroic figure who's capable of taking on the massive monsters you'll encounter on your journey.



△ The game's battle system is turn-based, although fights play out with a realistic feel as swords clang off shields and characters dodge blows.



So, for example, you could take a sword swipe that launches enemies into the air and link it to another slash, followed by a fireball, to create an aerial combo that's executed with a single button press. It's still turn-based, with moves that require time to 'charge' before you can use them, but the clashing swords at least look weighty. Characters dodge and parry in real-time and launch believable attacks that are limited by the range of their weapons, as opposed to the traditional stabby line dance usually associated with Japanese RPGs.

Tall order

The White Knight of the title refers to a magical suit of armour that our hero, Leonard, discovers which transforms

Who the hell is hell is Leonard?
The bright young thing set to be PS3's next RPG star

Character history

When a group called Wizard attacks the local castle, Leonard discovers the White Knight armour and fights off the bad guys. During the fuss the princess is kidnapped so he sets out to rescue her.

Equipment

The White Knight

After discovering the magical suit of armour Leonard is able to transform into a seven metre tall gleaming superhero.

Sword

Leonard fights with a short sword. It looks puny but he can send enemies flying with a single powerful blow.

Shield

He also has a shield which is used to deflect incoming attacks and, in a pinch, batter the bad guys back.

Speculation

We'd bet everything we own on Leonard suddenly discovering he's the last descendent of someone really important.



him into a seven-metre tall giant. And scale is an important part of the battles. While your party can handle general bad guys, there are also larger opponents to fight. We've seen a lumbering, gnarly troll, a large Lord Of The Rings Ent-style creature, and what looked like a cross between a naked Viking and a sumo wrestler - all as tall as buildings. Which is where Leonard's magic tin suit comes in handy, boosting his size to take on any threat. It isn't a one-on-one fight, though, as the rest of the group attack with you, albeit swarming around the monster's feet, doing their best to hack off a toe.

Giants and a fully customisable combat system all sound pretty promising, but White Knight has another trick up its gauntlet with its MMO-like multiplayer mode. Up to four players can meet online (although 16 can mingle in one of the lobbies) before setting off on quests. All we saw was a simple 'beat up the troll' mission, but Level 5 is promising a huge number of quests, completely separate to the single-player games, and producer Kentaro Motomura describing the game as "Two RPGs in one". Sold to the man in the magical suit of armour.



Dev talk



"One of the characteristics of the game is that there will be these enormous obstacles and creatures. For example, there's a huge monster with a town on its back."

Kentero Motomura Producer, Level 5



hen it comes to online multiplayer there's Call Of Duty 4 and then there's everything else. So Killzone 2 needs to set its sights high if it wants its online mode to be more than just a diversion.

What we've seen so far suggests that Guerrilla is taking the challenge seriously, with a wealth of new features and interesting ideas. Like a dynamic mission system where, rather than selecting one game type and sticking with it until you're bored, you can have several objectives that change on the fly as you play. So a Body Count match (Killzone's version of a deathmatch) could change, once you reach the kill limit, into

a Search And Retrieve game (basically CTF) and then Assassination, where one player is nominated as a victim, to be either hunted or protected depending on which side you're on. There are also Search And Destroy challenges and Team Body Count matches, any one of which can be set to kick in as you play.

Officer material

There's also plenty to unlock and achieve with 12 ranks in total that are obtained by collecting XP from achievements like kills and completed objectives. There are also 46 medals to obtain, tracking everything from headshots to reviving fallen teammates. Progressing up the

ranks will also unlock new perk-like abilities. Unlike COD, however, these take the form of 'Badges'. You can only pick two but they enable you to mix abilities – a stealth medic with a cloaking device and the ability to heal downed allies, say.

But the last word must go to the benchmark visuals. The multiplayer looks almost identical to the single-player campaign. So plenty of depth of field effects, fancy lighting, smeary motion blur and incredible explosions to admire. The framerate currently dips a bit when there's a lot going on but not massively, and when you consider just how arresting the action looks we're certainly not going to complain. For once.

✓ If you need practice then you can load a map with bots to play against.





Could Be A Contender

Bioshock 2: Sea Of Dreams



This one sounds like it's going to be a winner

The premise

Developer 2K Marin describes it as "both prequel and sequel" to the original.

The reality

We take that to mean you'll see the aquatic city of Rapture's collapse from Objectivist utopia to genehoovering nightmare.

The book

The trailer hints at an adult Little Sister - one of the girls rescued in the original returning to the drowned city.

The inspiration

Bioshock cribs from the philosophy of Anne Rand, who wrote Atlas Shrugged.

The chances

Original producer Ken Levine isn't attached to the new game, but our hopes remain salty. Full reveal next year.

Format PS3 ETA 2009 Pub Take Two Dev 2K Marin



Pre-Orders The punters' top three



Resistance 2

The Chimera invasion has moved to the US, and it's up to human/alien hybrid Nathan Hale to stop it. This is rock solid shooter action that also has 60-man multiplay

Format PS3 ETA 28 Nov Pub Sony



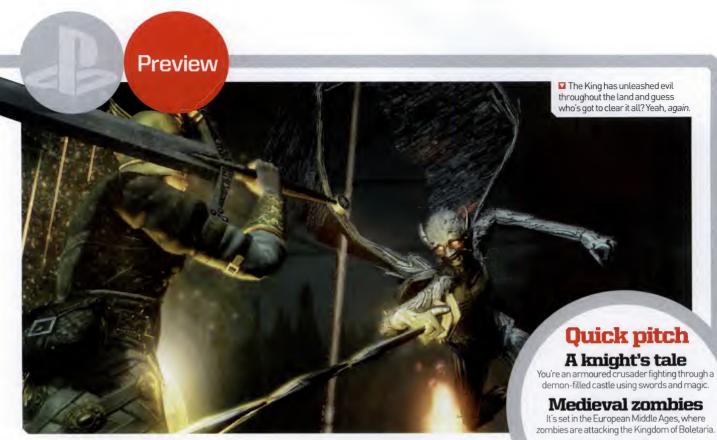
Prince Of Persia

There's a stylish new cel-shaded look, a new prince (plus sexy companion), and a new open world, but the rest is classic Persia-ridiculously fluid acrobatics, dodgy combat and huge puzzles.
Format PS3 ETA 5 Dec Pub Ubisoft



Silent Hill Homecoming

The first of the iconic survival horror series developed outside of Konami is still creepy but the greater emphasis on Format PS3 ETA Feb 2009 Pub Konami



PS3 Earl usive Format PS3 ETA TBC Pub Sony Dev From Software

Demon's Souls

△ Monsters ○ Magic ⊗ Good ○ Knight

hat with the Black Death and all that witch dunking, the Middle Ages have got a bad press. But there's a creaky, damp feel to Demon's Souls castle setting that creates a dark, eerie, real atmosphere. It's a refreshing change from the usual RPG primary colours. The downside is that the action feels way too retro in its ambitions, thanks to limited Al and dull combat.

Castle crasher

We start outside a grim, fog-wreathed fortress, as desiccated zombies stagger forwards to attack. The frame

rate lurches horribly out in this beautifully detailed open area, but settles into something more playable inside the castle. The combat is both functional yet uninspiring – attack and block are split between and some respectively with a special assault on and a defensive bash on short sword enables you to wield a blade and shield but reduces range, while a long, meaty broad sword offers greater reach but slower attacks.

Hopefully Demon Soul's later levels will spice things up a bit with better moves and some more threatening creatures like the huge monstrosities in the screenshots here. I did meet a few fireball-throwing zombies and found a potion that covered my sword in flames, so more of that please.

The story is set in a kingdom called Boletaria and charges you with saving everyone after the King accidentally releases monsters everywhere. Producer Takeshi Kajii says there are only loose objectives that you don't have to follow, which sounds promising, but that open-ended approach wasn't really apparent during the hands-on. The Middle Ages then: damp, dark, full of demons and racked with indecision. We'll fit in fine.



Sword shopCustomise your character, choosing from lightly armoured warriors to

lumbering behemoths.

"You get only the barest minimum of a goal, and there's nothing forcing you to do anything in the game." Takeshi Kajii Producer, Sony Jepan

The customising Exorcising these souls requires more than prayer







The ability to customise your tin-plate crusader affects how you fight the different enemies you encounter.



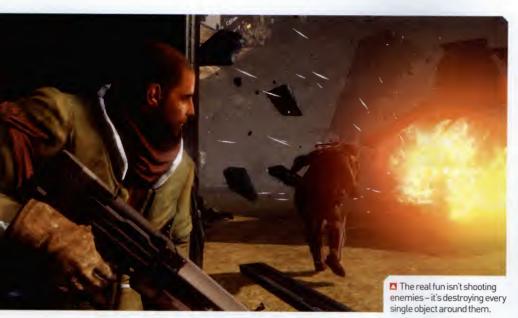






You can change your weapon, sex and character. Mr Average is a nippy but weak warrior, while a hulking brute waving a sword the size of a diving board is best for larger enemies.





Hype Magnet Format PS3 ETA Spring 2009 Pub THO Dev Volition Inc.

Red Faction Guerrilla

△ Destruction ○ Derby ⊗ On □ Mars

A ccording to associate producer Sean Kennedy, "Red Faction is about destruction and revolution." Which, given that it involves a sandbox filled with fire, vehicles and safe houses, makes it sound a lot like Mercs 2. On Mars. Sean disagrees, "Mercenaries doesn't do real destruction. They do explosions. They drop the structure out and put in damage models. In our game, the engine calculates stress, velocity, mass, and adjusts according to what you're doing." And what

You play miner-turned-rebel Alec Mason who, over the course of the

rockets it takes to level an office block.

we're doing is testing how many

game, will get his hands on nuclear rockets, a Nano Rifle that dissolves everything and a surprisingly powerful sledgehammer. Alec's aim is to bring down the corrupt governing EDF

corporation, who are slave-

driving the mining colony to extinction. Destroy one of its structures and a meter decreases – if it gets to zero, you'll drive the EDF from that area. To help you stick it to the Martian man there's also a Morale meter, filled by engaging in side-quests –

rescue people from house arrest and they'll fight with you in the revolution, for example. But, when you can topple whole buildings with a sledgehammer, who needs help?



"We retrained the artists to become architects. So everything you see in the game is built to real world standards." Sean Kennedy Associate producer Volition Inc



Can't Wait To Play...



Industry
insiders
reveal their
PS3 faves
Pete Smith
Senior producer, LittleBigPlanet

DC Universe Online



"PS3 needs a great MMO, and with Superman, Batman and the rest I think DC Universe Online will be a must-have. I'm going to get super strength and spend my time throwing cars at people!"

Resident Evil 5

"I thought Resident Evil 4 was great, and if the visuals are anything to go by, Resi 5 is going to be even better. I believe there is a new control system as well; those guys tend to get things right so this should be interesting."

Heavy Rain



"I've been lucky enough to have already played HR and it's incredible. No matter how many times people say the movies are all actual gameplay, you don't truly get it until you pick up a pad and play it. The game looks great, and with Quantic Dream as the developer I'm sure HR will go down as a milestone for storytelling in games."





- she wants to climb the tower but not destroy it, which means that the pair clash when they first hook up. But the whole 'the enemy of my enemy is my friend' thing means that the two are soon fighting together, with his fist and her [careful] sword combining for a lethal one-two alien shredder. The pair also have a selection of special moves that they can pull off together, and while all of this screams co-op mode, Tecmo has refused to confirm it so far. Nonetheless,

"Battlefields will physically distort to present new challenges."

there are multiplayer options: ranging from two-player face-offs to traditional team-based battles.

Finding emo

Quantum Theory also borrows Gears Of War's famous Roadie Run – a low, cover-hugging dash across open ground - and massive-shouldered armour, but the art-style feels more Japanese. This is a swoopy biomechanical vision of hell. The strange alien tower is brimming with brightly coloured stained-glass windows and ornamental architecture. Shibata reveals some unusual influences, such as 19th Century glass designer René Lalique and modernist architect Antoni Gaudí, telling us that he wanted to create a, "romantic, Art Nouveau style based on plant life and living organisms." At least there's no brown mesa rock to be seen.

The living nature of the tower means the battlefield will change as you play. Shibata's example: "Hiding behind objects that come from the floor or wall as it shifts in shape. You might be dodging bullets when suddenly the floor starts transforming, heaving in certain areas, which you can then use as a place to hide." Whether or not Quantum Theory can lift itself above its obvious influences may end up being a trickier problem.

Rip-off What Quantum Theory 'borrows'

Baroque architecture Unreal Tournament III

Designing an over-the-top, futuristic fantasy world with heavy Gothic overtones? Start here.

Male character design Gears Of War

From his armour, to his love of cover, to his macho run, Syd is clearly standing on the shoulder pads of very specific giants.



Acrobatics Devil May Cry

If you're battling evil, it's absolutely essential to do it flying through the air in a variety of cool poses.

Kinky swordstress Soulcalibur

A G-string so tight you could play House Of The Rising Sun on it, big sword, white hair... could Quantum Theory's Fillena be lvy's long lost identical twin?

Semi-organic scenery

HR Giger

Ever since the 1979 sci-fi classic Alien, Giger's sensational designs have 'inspired' environments in movie and videogame horror.





Unreal Tournament III

(PS3, Midway)
The quickest, twitchiest shooter on PS3 – the single-player campaign is weak, but it's all about the brutal multiplayer, which is bulked up with user-generated maps.



Fracture (PS3, Lucas Art

The chunky armour and shoulder-hugging camera are the stuff of sci-fi shooter cliché, but the ground-moving Entrenchergun is not.



Dear Ladies,

Your husband is wondering how to break the news to you of his plan to set up a big, black Home Cinema Receiver in your living room. Just tell him it's fine...
...as long as he lets you have something you really want. Well, 2 things...

If you want to find out more about what's obsessing him, visit: www.onkyo.co.uk

















TX-SR606





Solid next-gen outing for the showboating



Ninja Gaiden Ruthlessly harsh but fair slasher from Tecmo's Team Ninja. Despite being an Xbox port, it's essential stuf stars in Sega's crackers new actioner, her unruly tresses are just as likely to spontaneously transform into an enormous punching fist, a stamping stiletto boot or, erm, a giant hellhound. So it's clear fairly early on that Bayonetta is a) utterly ridiculous and b) in a world of po-faced, yee-hawing shooters - very much a good thing.

Ridiculousness has always been key to the ethos of Hideki Kamiya, the director of Bayonetta whose previous credits include Resident Evil 2, Devil May Cry and Viewtiful Joe. It's Devil May Cry which Bayonetta obviously shares most DNA with, though. The same relentless, super-stylish combat. The same screen-filling bosses. And the same Baroquearchitecture-meets goth-sex-disco

vision, this is the genuine stuff.

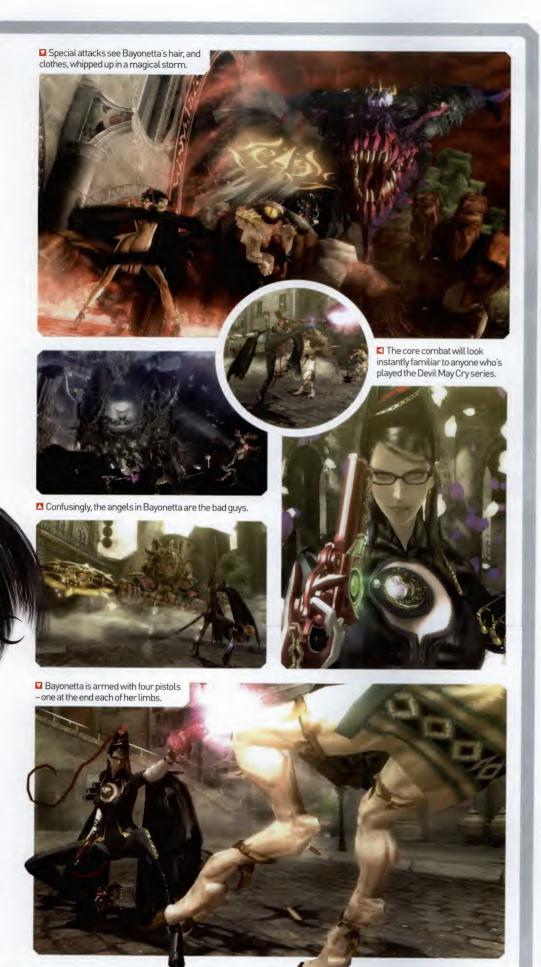
Devil May Copy

Every element of the game design is unfettered by niceties such as logic or comprehensibility. The action just explodes on-screen. Your enemies are winged beastmen and giant axewielding babies. Your weapons are boot-mounted pistols, combined with more pistols, katanas or anything else you can wrap your slender fingers around. Oh, and she can also dice and mash enemies using supernaturallysummoned torture devices. So hot.

And it's hard to believe we've got this far without discussing her bum. Bayonetta appears to have been poured into a pair of leather trousers, and when she walks it's with the most

outrageously suggestive wiggle ever committed to console. Somewhere in the distance Lara Croft's animator sheds a silent tear. Factor in that her most impressive attacks leave Bayonetta all but naked, and you've got a day one purchase. The plot? Okay then. Roughly: you're a witch, everyone else is an angel. Gotta kill 'em all.

Actually, not quite all. Last time we saw Bayonetta she was accompanied by another witchy-looking chick in one of the cut-scenes. The internet took this as confirmation that online co-op was all but confirmed, and although Sega won't be drawn we can but dream.



Gut Reaction

What's strong and what's wrong

▲ Can't stop the Sack

Now the musical mess-up has been rectified, LittleBigPlanet can get on with it's job: being game of the year.

▲ Not so evil empire

With the improvement of FIFA, plus brilliant originals Mirror's Edge and Dead Space, EA can again lay claim to being the best publisher, as well as the biggest.

▲ Coming on as sub

Yes, it's a bit broken, but we've become oddly obsessed with PES 2009's Become A Legend mode. "Just give me the bloody ball, Robinho!"

▼ Tekken 6 defects

"Go on, leave then.
Run to Xbox 360.
You should probably
know we've been
sleeping with
Soulcalibur IV
the whole time."

VGTA IV haters

Can someone please explain why the backlash? We've checked, and it's still engrossing, smart, funny and a joy to play.

V Musical mess

Plastic instruments
everywhere. Rock
Band 2 coming out
minutes after Rock Band 1.
And has Guitar Hero World
Tour got the better DLC? Erm,
isn't this supposed to be fun?



△ Blood ○ Terror ⊗ Girl □ Guns

EAR 2 developer Monolith knows that taking on intelligent opponents is way more fun than mowing down endless waves of idiot rent-a-grunts. And that's why, according to the game's principle art lead Dave Matthews, the developer's put so much work into upping their enemy smarts. "Players get excited about the idea that opponents are other people," he explains of the team's efforts to make FEAR 2's soldiers and ghoulish mutilated enemies more believable.

"In FEAR 2 the enemies' awareness has expanded to understand hazards such as fire, electrical damage and water, creating great opportunities." For example? "Use an incendiary to ignite someone, and they'll drop their weapon and pat themselves out, or run to water. If that's successful, they'll pick up a nearby gun and re-engage the player." It sounds like basic survival ("Oh, man, I'm definitely burning!") rather than HAL 9000-like birth of consciousness, but it has a noticeable affect on how the game plays.

"Ultimately, good AI should engage the player, keeping them on their toes and wanting more," Dave adds. So smarter enemies: good. But what we really want are scares. The first FEAR was like riding a ghost train with a machine gun - lots of pretty effects but it was all smoke and mirrors with only unspooky soldiers to actually fight. The mutilated creatures seen leaping around the new hospital level certainly look more horrific, and combined with FEAR's trademark slo-mo gunplay, should make this sequel a dark delight.

Dev talk



"The more time we spend on educating the AI, the greater the enemy are at utilising space creatively and responding to the players' behaviour."

Dave Matthews

Principal art lead,

Monolith

The hook How Project Origin mixes shooting and scares

FEAR is built around its hero's ability to slow time, creating beautiful gunfights full of arcing blood and lazily drifting bodies. Dead telepath Alma returns, adding an older and more powerful appearance to her classic creepy little girl look, and Monolith is talking big about its remodelled Al soldiers



Enemies on fire try to save themselves.



There's going to be more monsters and gore.



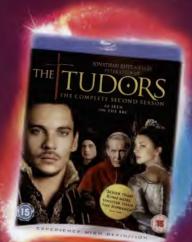
Alma returns as a lanky naked terror lady.

new to Blu-ray





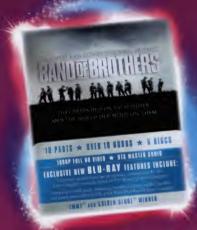
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The Latest On...

New shots, new games, new info



Final Fantasy XIII

Format PS3 ETA 2009 Pub Square Enix

The two main characters seen in the trailer have now been named – say hello to Snow Villiers (the boy) and Sera (the girl). Meanwhile, this latest shot shows monster-filled world of Pulse, with the safe haven of Cocoon floating in the sky.



Eat Lead

Format PS3 ETA Spring 2009 Pub D3 Publisher It's like Who Framed Roger Rabbit but for games. Game characters are 'real' and Matt Hazard is a has-been star brought out of retirement to fight through 'hilarious' game parodies. Our 6/10 siren is going crazy.



50 Cent: Blood On The Sand

THQ is doing Fiddy's seguel after it was discarded due to the Activision Blizzard deal. Set in a painstakingly non-specific part of the Middle East, it'll include shooting, driving and... wait, flying?



game cull of '08, Atari has picked up both Ghostbusters and The Chronicles Of Riddick: Assault On Dark Athena

great Activision/Sierra

There's more... Real fantasy football is coming to PSP with

Expect Riddick in the spring while there's no date yet for husters FA has confirmed sequels to Battlefield Bad Company (yay!) Dead Space (scary yay!) and Army Of Two (Oh). Finally, Bioshock's Challenge Rooms download should available exclusively on PSN asyou read this There's a decent chunk of gameplay there - rescuing Little Sisters, battling splicers and Big Daddies or solving puzzles – and it will set you back a not at all threatening £6.29.



Tekken 6 Bloodline Rebellion

Format PS3 ETA Autumn 2009 Pub Namco This arcade update includes new characters Lars Alexandersson, the illegitimate son of Heihachi Mishima, and Alisa Bosconovitch, a robot who

uses her detachable head as a bomb.



Edge Of Twilight

Format PS3 ETA Autumn 2009 Pub Southpeak Games You play as Lex, a bounty hunter who warps between the realms of Day and Night. You must move between them to solve puzzles and find a way to save the steampunk world vou call home.



Undead Knights

Format PSP ETA 2009 Pub Tecmo

Knights, cool. Zombie knights, cooler. You're fighting a rival kingdom as a soldier who's capable of turning the bodies of your enemies into undead who fight for you. More kills = bigger army.

Street Fighter IV

Format PS3 ETA 20 February 2009 Pub Capcom The cast of exclusive-toconsole characters continues to grow, with the four we revealed last month (Sakura, Seth, Fei Long and Cammy) joined by elderly Chinese martial artist Gen from the first Street Fighter, along with Ryu and Ken's master Gouken, and flame-haired über-boss Akuma (Gouken's younger brother). Capcom has also given a release date at last: Roll on 20 Feb.



THE NEXT GENERATION OF FIGHTING GAMES HAS ARRIVED



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PLAYSTATION 3











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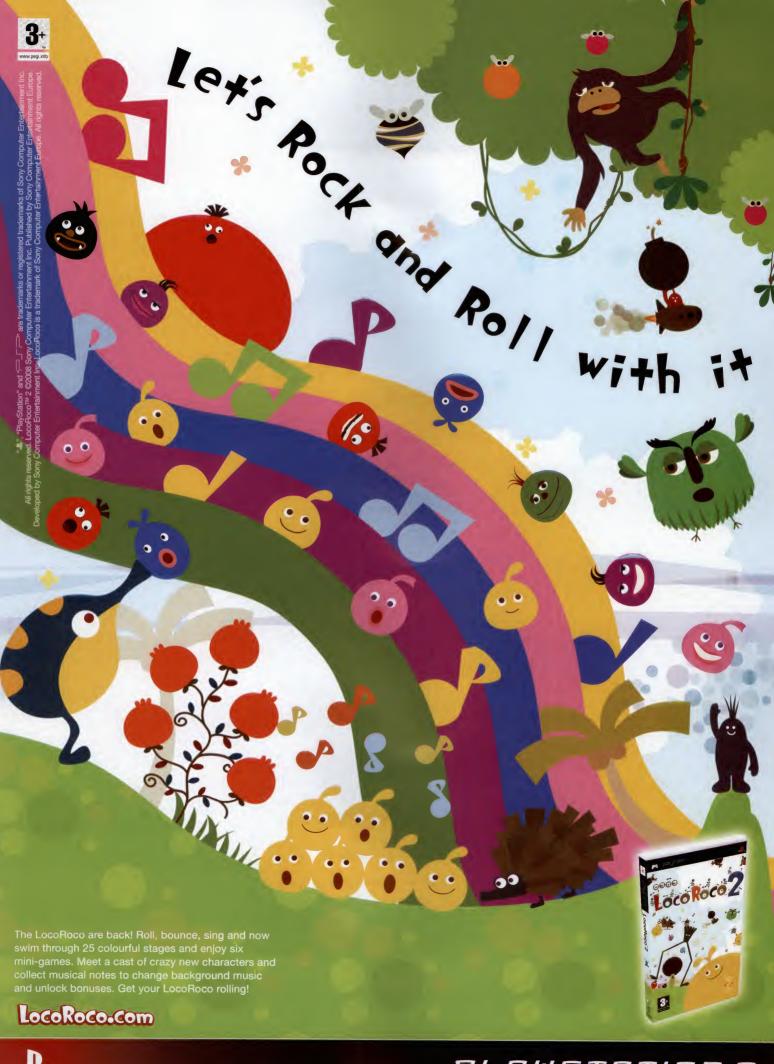
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Mark Healey



The making of a PS3 classic

Media Molecule's Mark Healey on LBP's DLC, Button Moon and stage fright

What's does your role at Media Molecule involve?

My official title is creative director. I'm not sure what that actually means, but along with Dave [Smith], who's the other lead designer, I tend to be responsible for a lot of the design. So I try to convince people of my ideas, which I tend to do by getting people in a really bad mood until they give in.

Where did the original idea for LittleBigPlanet come from?

It was a follow-on from Rag Doll Kung Fu, which is a little indie game that we did before LBP. I used to work at Lionhead Studios and in my spare time I started to write this little indie game because I wanted to dabble with coding a bit again. So I taught myself C++ and made Rag Doll. I had a lot of help from Alex [Evans, Media Molecule co-founder] and Dave [Smith]. Dave basically put the online side into it and Alex did the graphics engine. That was the beginning of us coming together as a team. We got that out the door and it was like, 'Okay,

we can do this for ourselves.' It felt like going back to the old days, because I used to work on my own or with two or three people. So we thought, 'Let's do a bigger game together,' one thing lead to another, and we managed to wrangle an audience with [ex-president of Sony Worldwide Studios Phil Harrison. But it was in one week's time, so we were like. 'Sh*t. we'd better think of something.' And we did. Dave had always been interested in physics. so he put together this 2D physics engine, and there were some ideas from Rag Doll Kung Fu that we wanted to take into the game. More high level concepts really. Like the ability to act, for example, and the ability to somehow customise the game. In Rag Doll Kung Fu, when I put in the ability for people to create their own character skills, there was a really big reaction to that. We wanted to take those aspects, and make them console-friendly.

Was sackboy involved at that point?

We put a little character into the 2D graphics engine called 'Yellowhead', which was the

very first incarnation of sackboy. You can find it on the internet [snipurl.com/4iyi5]. He's just a geometric 2D character, but we took that to our pitch and because we had something playable I think that was a big aspect of it. We didn't really know what we were pitching to be honest. We were pitching ourselves more than anything else, saying, 'Look, we've got all this history, this is what we've done before...' We've worked on quite a few big games actually, with Peter [Molyneux, Lionhead] – I think that just gave [Phil] enough. He went, These guys believe in themselves, we'll give them a chance, and surprisingly seemed to pick up on the user-created side of it. For us, that was more, 'We're not sure they're going to get this, but we'll throw it in as a side thing and hope it doesn't put them off.'

What happened next?

We had six months to create a fleshed-out demo, which is how it works with a lot of these things. Then you go to a green light meeting, which is a bit like Dragon's Den. There, we

interview Mark Healey

had a level to play through and, although the Create side was less fleshed out, there was an element of it in there. I think on the Play side alone, it was enough to impress Sony, because it's a nice graphics engine and it's fun. That's the main thing: you sit down and it's just fun to play.

At what point did you start to feel the enormous expectation around LBP?

I think Games Developers Conference [in 2007] was when we first realised that things were getting scary. I was terrified – we'd learnt that Phil was going to show the game in his keynote speech. We didn't really know what that meant at the time. We thought, 'Cool, it means a few people get to hear about it.' And then we turned up and we had to go do a dress rehearsal. So we arrived at the venue, went through the doors, and there were like 5,000 seats inside. I sh*t myself, basically.

Had you ever spoken to an audience that size before?

No, and I was like, 'Oh my god, I've got to stand up there tomorrow.' When I saw that stage, with all these little props they'd made from the game, I thought, 'Damn, Sony are putting some money into this.' Standing behind the curtain, waiting to be introduced, was the scariest moment of my life. 5,000 people... that's like rock stadium-style, isn't it?

Sackboy is now the iconic PlayStation character, isn't he?

Definitely. It's a bit surreal. These offices are on the verge of getting knocked down [the interview takes place in Media Molecule's Guildford HQ, situated over a bath showroom] and we've made LBP cheaply. Some games have budgets of 30, 40 million pounds – we've done it for just a few million, which is amazing. The important thing for me is everyone here is really proud of what we've worked on.

How did the design for sackboy work?

We had a few rules, like he had to be a blank canvas that you could dress up, but at the same time be recognisable as a character. We also wanted acting to be a big part of the game, which is one of the things we took on from Rag Doll Kung Fu. Because the camera zooms in and out we had to give him a big head, and if you look at sackboy he's like an emoticon on legs. The zip thing came about because the original idea was that everything you made was inside your character, so if you wanted to invite people to play your levels, you'd have to kinda unzip yourself and they'd jump inside. It was a bit too far out for some people, but the zip is still there, because it kinda made sense. It also gave it scale. When you see the zip, you go, 'Okay, he's quite small.'

How did the 'craft' look develop?

There's a lot of shooter-type games with dark environments and smoke everywhere, which are cool, but it's hard to stand out from that unless you're really amazing. Alex [Evans] is a very talented engine programmer, so we knew we wanted to flex that muscle, but at the same time have something fresh. And the craft materials, I guess that's inspired by old kid's programmes, like Button Moon and Chorlton And The Wheelies. We wanted to make it look like little sets that were being filmed by a video camera, so wanted strong depth of field and motion blur to look realistic. At the same time we wanted fantastical elements, and when you think about building things, the idea of cardboard, fuzzy felt and Sellotage is less intimidating than polygons and verticies. It's a way of making it easier to understand; it was there from the start really.

What's the first big thing you made using the LBP tools?

It was probably something quite rude, to be honest. When we got switches in there, that

What were your impressions of the pre-release Beta?

I was blown away. On the first day there were a thousand levels on there. It confirmed that people were using the creative tools. I found some amazing stuff, even after a few days. And those people hadn't even played the story mode, which is one of our main ways of informing and inspiring people. The levels started feeding off each other. Suddenly, all these levels started having rocket-powered vehicles. The best one I saw was the Wipeout tribute level, with an awesome ship that flies around this mad track. I can't imagine what it'll be like when people really start to get their heads around what's possible.

How did you set the limits on the power you gave people to create?

A lot of it was trial and error, and experience from working on games in the past. Most – well, all – big games have some kind of map editor that the dev team use, often using tools that are similar to what's available in LBP. We just tried to present them a bit more nicely. In

"Anything the community is hungry for, hopefully we can supply."

was a real turning point. For a long time, we were just relying on physics and simple little motors and things. But once you put switches in there, that opened it up massively. The level designers were making things we didn't think were possible. Victor, one of our level designers, did a version of Pong, and that was like, 'Cool, really starting to get a feel of what's possible now' - he even tried to do Outrun. And we were like, 'How on Earth did you manage that?' It was like a 2Dish kinda game, and he'd had a 3D road painted onto wooden slats, and then he'd made this mad device that moved and created the curves on the road. So, yeah, I'd say the switches were a turning point, they're a really low level, simple thing that can be used in so many different ways.

What does your own sackboy wear?

I tend to go between two different ones. I've got one that's purely red, with red horns and big starry, pink glasses – he looks really seedy. The other one is just a plain sackboy with a cardboard mask and a photo of me doing a silly expression. There's something quite eerie about seeing yourself run around on this little munchkin. I like the fact that you can use the PS Eye. That opens it up.

terms of limits, it's like, 'Okay, I wanna be able to make a piece of string at least this long,' and then somebody else will say, 'We can't do that because of X, Y and Z,' and we'll just fight until we get to some kind of happy ground.

Did you end up removing many ideas?

A few actually. Interestingly, the first incarnation of the Create side was completely different. There were physical tools that existed in the world. You'd have to run up to them and wear them like a sponge gun, for example, which is like a flamethrower, but it spewed out sponge. It looked cool, but it was almost impossible to make anything with it. To sit down and try to make an entire level with that would've been a nightmare. So that whole system got scrapped. There's some other things we had in there which we took out temporarily, but will put back in at a later date.

Like what?

We had a gravity slider you could control, but we need to refine it – that'll be an easy one to add, so you can do a Hero-style gravity level. Wind was another, so you can create a strong wind to blow in one direction. Painting was something else we took out – we felt we didn't



need it because of the stickering. Obviously we had this commitment to get something on a Blu-ray by a certain date, so we had to cut off the ideas at some point. But that doesn't mean we're not going to do them, because we plan to support it for as long as possible. And anything the community is hungry for, hopefully we can supply.

Is there anything in the Story mode which couldn't be made by users?

Nope. In theory, it's all possible. I've been very strict about that. I'm sure someone will find something that they think is impossible, but I'll show them that it is possible.

Do you plan to continue publishing Media Molecule-created levels?

I hope so. I'm going to be off work for the next month, because I'm having my baby. Maybe naively, I think I may have a little bit of time. I plan to dive in there and make some personal levels, like my Tetrisy type thing. I'm keen to do a string of those and put them out there to help inspire people and show other things that are possible. It can look like, 'Okay, you can make 2D platform games', but I'm keen to encourage a broader vision. I just put the finishing touches to my Breakout level, which is incredibly cool. I've called it Sack Smash, or Sack Out, or something like that. I've also done a Space Invaders-type game. I've got this whole string of ideas that I want to do.

Will you be disappointed if people just make Mario knockoffs?

No, because it's cool that people are excited by that. It'll be good to make people realise that that's just the beginning. You can really go beyond that. The thing that I'm really looking forward to will be when I see someone make a really original, new type of game. If it's possible for me to make a Tetrisy type thing then it's entirely possible someone could invent a new Tetris. So that's what I'm really looking forward to - somebody making a cool new type of puzzle game. Especially with the new tools and ideas we're releasing later. It's going to become more and more possible to make different types of games.

How will downloadable content work?

We're playing it by ear at the moment, waiting to see what the community wants. We've got various costumes and things planned, but in terms of larger bundles or packs we're not really committed to any one particular thing at the moment. It's a whole new territory to me. so I don't really know where to begin. We're just dipping our feet into that pool and seeing what's viable as running a business - we want to give away as much stuff for free as we can. But if it requires a lot of manpower, and it's not







possible to make money from it, then we'll fail as a business. So we'll see how that goes.

Do you expect to see other companies using LBP to create levels themed around their products? Say, a Watchmen level to go with the film?

That'd be fantastic. It's hard to speculate on what'd work though. For me it's similar to the internet in some ways. People making - I hate to use the word 'levels', it's more like a website really – because you don't have to make a gameplay experience, you could make something that has a nice picture of a new movie that's coming out, or a physical blog.

Would involvement of other companies run counter to the spirit of LBP?

Our number one priority is to build a thriving community where people are empowered. When I was getting into the games industry. there was such a huge thrill in making something, and other people enjoying that thing. LBP is something we're trying to spread - that feeling of how exciting it is to be creative. I'd love to go to the extreme of people creating content and making money from the game. That's what I'd like to do. But it's like treading on glass, because it'd have a lot of people up in arms, so I don't know how we'd do that yet. It's not that I'm a money-mad person, but making money has enabled me to carry on creating. And that's exciting.



It was a personal mission of mine. I think he's fantastic, he makes me laugh - there's something about his character that's really attractive in a wise old teacher way, and I'm a massive fan of Hitchhiker's Guide To The Galaxy and the voiceover stuff he did [for the movie] seemed perfect for LBP. But whenever the idea came up we thought, 'It'd be fantastic, but it won't be possible.' That's the amazing thing about working with someone like Sony - you can make these things happen.

What audience is LBP aimed at?

When we initially pitched the game to Sony, we had to say who our key market was. We were either very naive or very bold, because we wanted everyone from little kids to hardcore gamers to mothers who knit. I was always excited by the idea that it's a game that could be played by a parent and a child. That was a big driving factor for me. Especially knowing I was going to have a child in the near future. and as much as I love shooters, I can only take so much of them. I guite liked the idea of sitting down with a child and doing something creative with them as opposed to just running around, blowing off people's heads.



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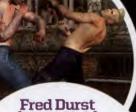


In the mood for...

Celebrities

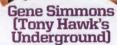
You're nobody until you've appeared in a videogame

They tell us how to vote, advise us on global warming and grope each other listlessly on beaches. But it's no longer enough for celebrities to own a dog that fits in a handbag or guest star in an episode of Entourage - game appearances are the new must-have accessory. Software companies are happy to play along, too, knowing that a 'name' automatically makes a game a lot more newsworthy. Most developers will happily digitise anyone, however irrelevant, and release a cheat code to unlock them two weeks after the game goes on sale. Here are some of our faves...



Fred Durst (Fight Club)

Having already appeared in 2001's Smackdown! Just Bring It, where legions of fans flocked to hit him with chairs. Fred Durst also made it onto the roster of the dreadful Fight Club game. He claimed, "I can't imagine a lot of people want to be me and fight as me so much as they want to beat me up. And I'm alright with that." Are you, Fred? Really?



After the shocking Kiss Psycho Circus, the painted rockers made a surprise return to videogame form in THUG frontman Gene Simmons appears as a secret character, and the boys appear in a secret ATV park called Hotter Than Hell. Liptrick the letters of their name and they'll perform Rock 'N Roll All Night.

Phil Collins (GTA: Vice City Stories)

In the 1980s 'the bloke who did that song the gorilla drums to in that advert' was known as Phil Collins, and he was huge. How huge? Well, if you choose to buy tickets to see a virtual Collins' perform In The Air Tonight in Vice City Stories it'll cost you a staggering \$6,000. You can see it for free at snipurl.com/4g3tl.

Snoop Dogg (True Crime: Streets Of LA)

What's more fun than upholding the law as tough cop Nick Kang? Breaking it as the Doggfather himself, the D to the double Gizzle. Collect 30 special 'Dogg Bones' (or enter a cheat code) and you can play as Snoop in a series of secret missions. He's also in Def Jam:

FFNY as inexplicably nails final boss Crow.











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featurePlayStation Network



Over the last year the PlayStation Network has cemented a reputation for serving up some of the finest thrills on PS3. Now, we discover the gems heading your way in 2009...









PlayStation Network

PSN Insider



Creative director Alex Ward explains how PSN has changed the way Criterion develops games

How has PSN changed Burnout Paradise?

If you're buying Burnout now, it's different to what it was at release. We've fixed and improved it, which rarely happens and we did some massive updates, adding another ten to 15 hours of gameplay.

How do you decide what to change or add?

As an online product we get hundreds of thousands of people trying to break it. Telemetry tells us what people are doing, and people also feedback to our website. It's not necessarily fixing things that are wrong. People use the game in a very different way and we're looking all the time. Just like Amazon, we can see what sells, and what doesn't sell. If there's a problem, we'll fix it. As a developer you'll always want to change it anyway, and if you can make it better, you can. It's like a TV show – if ratings fall, they'll tune it. We see a future where it's a completely live service where we can change the game every minute. We're not ready yet, because it takes some time, but in the future we'll be changing the game – adding and taking things away based on what people want.

What sort of things have you learned from monitoring the game online?

We had ranked competitive ratings and we thought, "Wow this is going to be massive." But then we also introduced Freebird Challenges, and the Telemetry shows that ten times the amount of hours – thousands of hours every day – are spent doing Freebird Challenges. Ranked racing is a small percentage of that. So 95% of people playing the game every day are doing Freebird Challenges, rather than high scores.

What was your master plan when approaching DLC?

We wanted to change what people thought about DLC and what people thought about Burnout. We want to set the standard for how we think DLC should be. Rock Band. all you get is selling songs. Driving games sell cars. There are so many things we could do, so many different business models. The world is changing. So we were thinking, "We'll add to the city, add an island," and we sat here and went, "Is that going to be enough?" You look at what other games have done. We could offer some new cars, fair enough. We sat here and went, "Bikes." It was the biggest bet we could make

Is DLC an extra incentive to buy the game?

Exactly. What we're doing is not just more content, it's different content. We're trying to attract new people. If we post it on our blog or forum in advance, then we get new people interested in the game.

So why are you doing it all for free?

Well, you've bought the game.



Pub Pinnacle Software Dev Doublesix Out January 2009

The best thing about zombies is that you can kill as many as you like without any guilt.

Which is a good, because here,

they're queuing up to be shot, battered and blown up in their

hundreds. Think Cash Guns
Chaos' top-down arena
shooting and you get the idea.
Points are scored for any
kind of undead offing, but the
big points come from setting
them alight (hence the title).
The more you can get blazing,
the more your combo will sky
rocket as they bump into and

ignite their rotten pals. So, while there's a range of weapons like Uzis or shotguns to try, your best friend is a length of burning two-by-four.

Who doesn't loves burning zombies?



hot, but if she

keeps leading

those zombies on she's

Söldner-X: Himmelsstürmer

Pub Eastasiasoft Dev SideQuest Studios Out December 2008

Okay, it translates roughly as 'Mercenary-X: Sky Conqueror' in the German, and it's a brutally punishing, side-scrolling shooter in the vein of classic arcade blaster R-Type, where relentless waves of enemies swarm across the screen, requiring pixel-perfect steering and a relentless barrage of firepower to survive. It makes Stardust HD's enemy attacks look a bit lazy by comparison. Pick-ups add additional weapons – drones, for example, that orbit your ship firing more bullets,

orbit your ship firing more bul or a wide electrical blast that enables you to target multiple enemies – but ultimately success comes down to how good your hand-to-eye co-ordination and reactions are. These days we struggle to read the words on the options screen. Still, placing 768,926 on the leaderboard is an achievement, right?

big meaty man shooters, and the taste of defeat.





feature

PlayStation Network

Original ideas

PSN is brimming with creativity and invention. Looking for something fresh? Try these...

Rag Doll Kung Fu Fists Of Plastic

Pub Sony Dev Tarsier Studios Out February 2009

You couldn't get further from Street Fighter II if you tried. Springy, rubbery characters throwing elasticised punches at each other to the sound of comedy 'Hiiii-yaas!' and Bruce Lee-style sound effects. It looks ridiculous and plays brilliantly. Combat is an instantly accessible mix of punches and kicks with some interesting Sixaxis moves thrown in. Jerk the pad towards a player mid-combo, for example, and you can finish with a powerful Firefly attack. Grab an opponent and you can bang the pad downwards to body-slam them to the floor. When four of you are competing in a Capture The Fish match, and everyone's waving the pad around like lunatics, it's as hilarious as it is exhausting. Other game types include a straightforward four-on-four competition and a King Of The Hill mode where points are earned for occupying certain parts of the map. You even get a bonus for striking poses, using the shoulder buttons and sticks LBP-style to wave your arms around. And, if you haven't got any mates handy then there are plenty of single-player challenges to keep you busy while you practise your Crane pose. Download it because It's a fun brawler to play with mates.



Sony www thatgamecompany Mail TBC 2009

According to its creators, Flower "exploits the tension between urban bustle and natural serenity" and "hopefully by the end of the journey, you change a little as well". Which makes it sound like some awful hybrid of Lottery-funded community workshop and a nervous breakdown on reality TV. So think of Flower, instead, as a sexy

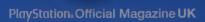
masseuse for your aching brain. Using a single button you propel a swirling cloud of petals over the landscape, collecting more as you pass over other flowers, which also triggers Eno-esque audio tinkles and gradually returns colour to the otherwise desaturated fields. It's every bit as calming as you'd expect from the follow-up to Flow, one of the first standout games on PSN, and the perfect antidote to the sluicing blood, shattered bones

and hopeless screams that comprise our usual gaming diet.
You'll save money on therapist bills.

""I think the low overhead or downloadable games allows

riske, and then the players can decide what they like and what they don't, an, if you never try anything new, how to you know what gamers really like?"

Kellee Santiago president, that game company



feature

PlayStation Network

PSN Insider



Game director **Dvlan** Jobe explains how Warhawk could have only happened on PSN

What was the single greatest challenge when you started Warhawk?

The biggest was fighting the stigma of downloadable the case, but there are still some barriers we need to

How has the ability to add downloadable content and develop the game 'live' affected the creative process?

Is there anything you know now about making a PSN game that you wish you'd realised at the start?

What do you think will be the future for PSN in terms of services, capabilities and what it can bring to PS3?

Do you think PSN will foster creativity in a way that larger, more expensive disc-based products can't?



generation of heteronormative a**holes", as one feminist blogger complained.

we cautiously suggest that the target audience for Fat Princess is in fact a new generation of people with a sense of humour". Essentially it's cartoon Capture The Flag for 32-players, in which your flag is the lardy lovely of the title. The more cake you feed her, the heavier she becomes (it's like a documentary!), making it harder for the other team to haul her sugary behind back to their base and score a point. There's also a range of

different character classes to pick from, ten confectionarythemed levels designed to shape battles - the island maps have tides that rise and fall, for example – and enough blood to drown Eli Roth. This is

our hottest tip for next year's PSN Game Of The Year title.

Download it because You love cutesy graphics mixed with the worst kind of trash talk.

Gomibako

Pub Sony Dev Sony Out TBC

This is one of those puzzlers that looks easy but will have your blood boiling as it beats your brain into one humiliating submission after another. Gomibako means 'trash can' in Japanese and the aim is to fill yours with as much rubbish as you can. carefully arranging waste to keep packing it in. But it's not that simple. (What is?) Materials such as wood can be broken into pieces so that the splinters take up less space. Plus you can burn rubbish, although fire will only spread across flammable material that touches. You can also rot items, such as paper, if placed underwater. Both of which activities will create more space for you to pile more junk into. Part game, part waste management, it's basically Greenpeace does Tetris. Wownload Minegalise It's a clever twist on a block puzzler.

feature

PlayStation Network

Mind games

Give your brain a workout with PSN's best strategy and puzzlers

Savage Moon

Pub Sony Dev Fluffylogic Out December 2008

Tower defence games are perfect for PSN: addictive bite-sized strategy challenges. In this case using your construction skills to build fortifications that can hold back swarms of Insectocytes – Starship Trooper-inspired aliens. Rather than fighting them directly you have to arrange automated weapons to defeat them. So, to stop a wave of drones from destroying your base you simply build some machine gun nests, sit back and enjoy the bug carnage. Survival means choosing equipment carefully. Flying enemies

carefully. Flying enemies
require anti-air guns to take
them down while you'll need
heavy ordnance like partial canons or
mortars to stop the bigger beasts. Get it wrong and you'll have
to watch as they stomp everything into little pieces.

Because Insectocytes can go anywhere, and you can drop towers wherever you want, it feels more freeform than Pixeljunk Monsters. Plus you have limited resources – do you buy blocking towers to herd

resources – do you buy blocking towers to herd aliens into a crossfire or blow the lot on the shop's biggest guns? (It's not a trick question.)

Download It because You're a tactical

wunderkind in need of a challenge.

"Freedom is very important. Creative game design requires a certain amount of risk-taking and experimentation. While of course we take risks with our showcase Blu-ray titles, we are able to take much greater risks with our PSN games. This freedom often leads to more creative and quirky ideas, that wouldn't otherwise work as full-priced retail products."

Tomas Rawlings Fluffylogic development director

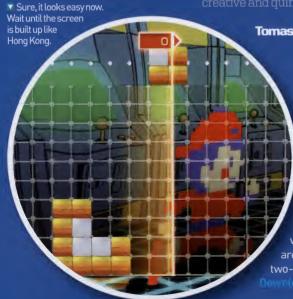


Pub Sony Dev 0 Entertainment Out December 2008

The essential formula hasn't really changed since Lumines first appeared (to universal hugs and kisses) on PSP. The basic tile-clearing action is simple enough – match colours, creating four-by-four grids to clear the screen – while every button press, brick cleared, combo or multiplier adds musical notes to an electro/pop/rock soundtrack, slowly hypnotising you as you play.

But apart from being on PS3, Supernova has a few new tricks to keep things fresh. Firstly there's a new Dig Down mode where you must clear a screen already filled with blocks. There's also a Sequencer mode that enables you to edit together various drum, bass and synth loops, plus effects, to create your own music. And there are 40 new skins to unlock and play with, either on your own or against a mate in the two-player competitive mode.

Oppoload it becouse It's a classic and endlessly addictive puzzler.







PlayStation Network

PSN Insider



PSN's senior producer Phil Gaskell explains how a network game gets made

How do you decide what games are going to be on the PSN?

We've signed games based on a page of A4 and we've signed games that have come to us finished. We work out green light meeting. We present the games in front of people like David Reeves (SCEE president) and the senior positive, it's green lit for production.

What are the factors that lead to a game being green lit?

Do we have something like this already? Will the launch will be games, strategically, that don't make money but are necessary to make PSN look popular and get

Is there a great difference between developing PSN and retail games?

So what are the stages of production when making a game?

Why have there been differences between content



Pub Capcom Dev Capcom Out December 2008

Why intelligent aliens from another planet would cross

the galaxy to bother sheep

is beyond us. (Just lonely, maybe? They are so soft...) But it's a good enough reason for a puzzle game in which you have to scare animals and solve physicsbased puzzles in order to herd them into your mother ship. Using your flying saucer you'll have to corral the sheep (plus cows, chicken and pigs) towards the goal or use a tractor beam to manipulate the environment smashing through fences with a boulder, for example. You can also

set traps such as using a 'sexy' lady sheep to tempt the rest of the flock like a woolly Pied Piper. And when you've mastered all the in-game challenges you can make your own in the level editor.

Download it because You have issues with agriculture.

On The Rain-Slick Precipice Of Darkness

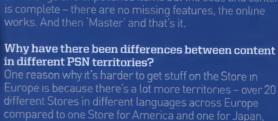
Pub TBC Dev Hothead Games Out TBC 2009

The stars of OTRSPOD (or 'otter's pod', as they're calling it) will be instantly familiar to fans of gaming webcomic Penny Arcade, the two creators of which collaborated on this steampunk comedy RPG. So that should mean a 70/30 win rate on the funnies. The game is structured episodically, but cleverly you can play the chapters in any order,

because each one is a selfcontained story, but any experience and stats will carry over to the next one.

The story follows the Startling Developments Detective Agency as they solve various mysteries in a 1920's flavoured world called New Arcadia. Expect handle bar moustaches, HP Lovecraftian horror and sly gaming in-jokes.

You want to level up and laugh at the same time.





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With PSP you can not only play a multitude of amazing games, but also play movies, listen to music, take photos, chat to friends and surf the net. It's your gateway to entertainment, and it all fits nicely into the palm of your hands. You'll never be bored on that bus journey ever again.

The new PSP 3000 series with its build-in microphone and brighter screen has arrived.





Next month in...

PlayStation Brown Official Magazine - UK

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Heavy Rain
On location with the
darkest game on PS3



Your essential guide to every new release

And somehow it goes on, massive game after massive game. After last month's insane flood of reviews it feels sort of impossible that there could be anything left, but the end of year lineup just keeps coming, like a terminator made entirely from words and pictures.

Last issue's reviews were strong like an armoured bear with an Uzi, but this month is equally strong, if different, like, um, a heavily camouflaged gorilla with a crossbow. And what do apes in camo paint like? They like exclusive reviews of Prince Of Persia, the dashing Middle Eastern adventure from Ubisoft's elite Montreal team. They also like verdicts on big shooters like Call Of Duty: World At War, Fallout 3 and 007: Quantum Of Solace, plus a huge round-up of all the new PS3 rock games, and games which don't fit neatly into any clever category with each other like Need For Speed Undercover, Manhunt 2, Shaun White Snowboarding and Alone In The Dark: Inferno. Can we have a mince pie now please mother?



PRINCE OF PERSIA

It's just like before, only more so... Glorious environments! Breathtaking climbing! Slightly wrong combat!



FALLOUT 3

Oblivion was our first ever 10/10 game – can its twisted post-nuclear offspring get anywhere close to a maximum?



CALL OF DUTY: **WORLD AT WAR**

Beautiful engine courtesy of Infinity Ward's sublime Call Of Duty 4, occasionally clunky design courtesy of Treyarch.

How we score our reviews...

Essential

Instant classic that's as close as it gets to PlayStation perfection.

Outstanding

Highly recommended, a vestment you won't regret.

Very good

Mostly excellent, but held back by one or two minor flaws.

Good

Enjoyable, but with definite roon

Reasonable

A decent offering, but one that only satisfies in places

Average

Agame that is both fun and frustrating in equal measure

Below average Too flawed to be anything more than a brief curiosity.

Poor

A seriously flawed game with no long-term appeal.

Awful

A disgrace to the bargain bin. Avoid it as you would a bullet.

Horrific

Buy this shocker and watch your console self-combust in protest



Our highes accolad

The gold award is presented to any game that we feel demonstrates significant innovation, near flawless gameplay, great graphics and profound appeal.







Prince Of Persia

He's a lover, not a fighter



ell, he's certainly a lot more charming on PS3. This new Prince is much changed from his last-gen predecessor. He's new and improved, with a knack for witty one-liners and even sharper acrobatic skills, but none of the time-shifting powers that dropped his PS2 equivalent into a royal mess of Nazi fancy dress proportions. Instead he has a magical sidekick lady called Elika, who he meets at the start. He's looking for his goldladen donkey (called Farah, in a sly nod to your love interest in Sands Of Time) and she's running away from a group of burly men waving halberds (which, for those of

you who didn't grow up playing Dungeons & Dragons, are like big swords on a stick). It's a typical boy-meets-flying-blue-energy-girl story: he rescues her from the bad guys, she supernaturally plucks him from thin air when he slips to a fatal fall. Next, they rock up at a huge temple where – drama! – her old man spoils things by releasing the dark god Ahriman and unleashing a terrible corruption on the land.

And obviously it's up to you to fix it, with Elika's help. The temple stands at the centre of fertile lands which, according to the winding storyline, provide the energy to keep Ahriman imprisoned. To stop him escaping now the seal is broken you must travel with Elika through a world covered with oozing black nastiness (imagine what happens when you drop sweeties

behind the fridge, only covering everything) restoring brightness, flowers and sunshine. It's a bit like Okami – you make the world prettier as you go.

Body works

All of which is really just a big fat excuse to give you something to do with the Prince's slinky athleticism, and a huge playground to do it in. The good news is that the core of the game - the running, jumping and climbing – is an unqualified success. The Prince has all the abilities you remember - poleswinging, ledge-climbing, his scurrying, gravity-bedamned wall-runs - as well as a bunch of new ones. Like being able to safely grip-fall down sheer surfaces using his metalclawed gauntlet with 12.

What you do in... POP

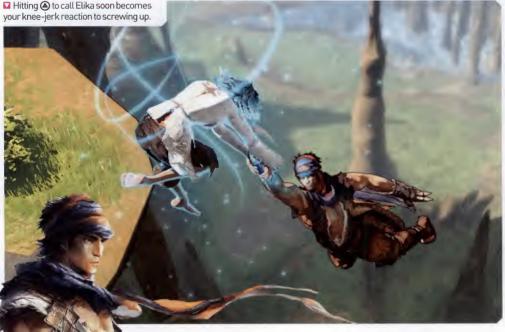


Plays ion Official Magazine UK

reviewPS3

Prince Of Persia







■ The nimble, spiralling roof-run animation is the most fluid and satisfying in the game.



One of Elika's powers is short on-rails flying. It's a pain to control and pretty ugly to look at.



△ Boss fights can devolve into thumb-cramping quick-time button-hammering. Just die you idiot!

"The combos are simple to pull off but limited next to God Of War"

grabbing big brass rings with **()**, or using Elika's magical pull-me-up to do extra long jumps with **()**.

Stringing the moves together is friendlier, if maybe a little less challenging, than in the PS2 games. There you'd have 'what the hell?' moments trying to figure out where to go next. Here it's more like putting together the pieces of a satisfying, big-blocked puzzle - it's never that hard to work out what goes where, but thanks to the gorgeously fluid animation (the Prince tumbling impossibly on the underside of ledges is a favourite) making it all happen is enjoyable anyway. There's a slight weirdness to not being able to die - Elika catches and resets you every time you make a deadly error - but it's really not that different to being able to rewind time like in Sands, and after a few falls you'll appreciate the fact that it takes as read the whole 'game over, reload, reposition' business and just lets you get on with it.

To make the most of the new Prince's athleticism the world is built differently to the linear

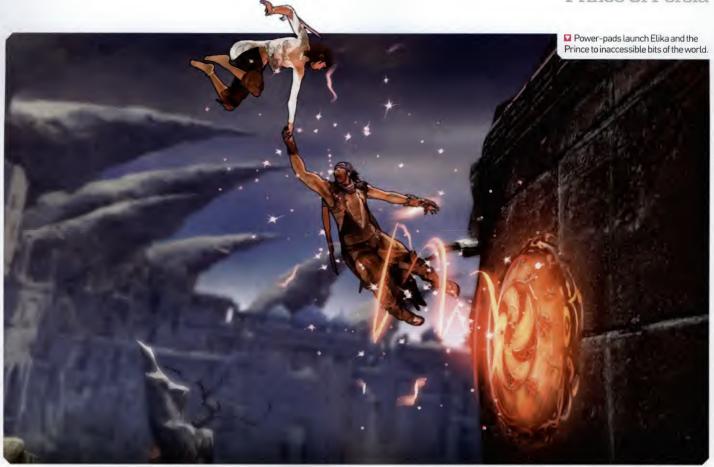
structure of previous POPs. There are four explorable areas branching away from the temple hub – the Citadel, the Vale, the Royal Palace and the City Of Light – each containing a further six smaller areas which need to be healed. It's a flexible world rather than an open one, designed to give you freedom to select your own route through what is still a straight start-to-finish experience.

And it's beautiful. Whatever reservations you may rightly hold about the semi cel-shaded character style, the scale and colour of the environments is incredible. Each main area has a central cluster of four fertile grounds to visit, arranged as the four corners of a square. As you heal them the vibrant character of the different areas come to life – the lustrous Arabian spires of the Palace, the





Prince Of Persia



decking-and-flags dockyard feel of the Vale – and because you can see across them all from any point inside, they each build into a grand, sprawling canvas. The game's biggest payoff comes when you clear out a cluster to create a long, uninterrupted obstacle course packed with collectible light seeds – sparkles of light, often challengingly placed, that appear when you restore each level and give you an incentive to keep exploring.

Popped out

There's a but, though, and the but is combat. Never a Persia strong suit, it's been redesigned here as a one-on-one duelling system in a deliberate attempt to force players away from mindless hack/ slashing and button thumping. The results are mixed. As soon as a fight starts the Prince is locked into position facing the enemy, removing all his acrobatic ability and slowing things to a crawl. Weirdly, you move faster when you're blocking with 12, to encourage caution and precision (sounds exciting, right?). The combos are simple to pull off once you've adjusted to the slower pace, but are pretty limited and lack the spectacle of Devil May Cry or God Of War. And it isn't helped by the fact that your enemies are unusually repetitive - one boss for each of the four map areas who

Castlist

The hero



The Prince
A mysterious tomb-raiding adventurer with a nice line in self-effacing jokes.

The princess



Elika Your sidekick. She invokes magic designed to battle the dark god, Ahriman.

The corrupted



Hunter
One of Ahriman's top boys, he sold his soul in return for the power to hunt men.



Grip-falling down walls: handy, but it makes a sound that will make you bite your own teeth off.

you fight several times apiece, and a handful of shadowy grunts. Throw in some apparently random interruptions from quick-time events during battles and you've got a system that's just about functional but falls short of its subtle, ambitious aims, and which you'll plough through rather than look forward to.

Aside from this, though, everything's super-polished and finessed. The relationship between the Prince and Elika is drawn with unusual delicacy thanks to an on-demand conversation system which, when you press

(III), offers hundreds of lines of dialogue intelligently delivered to take account of which route you've taken through the game and how much progress you've made. It takes a while to get used to the



■ There are only a handful of puzzles, but this sluice gate lever beast is a lengthy monster.

Prince's new voice – he doesn't just sound like Nathan Drake, that actually is Nathan Drake, the actor Nolan North – but the self-effacing quips balance out the innate smugness of a dashing royal adventurer without resorting to the adolescent nonsense of the PS2 sequels, and are therefore a good thing.

So what you're getting is a Persia with better acrobatics than ever, set upon a stage which is as grand and impressive as Assassin's Creed but way more interactive. The combat's a bit bust but

PlayStation.

not a deal-breaker, and the characters are deep and likeable enough to make for good company for the 12 or so hours you'll spend with them. It's a win, then, though maybe not on the scale it could

have been. **Nathan Ditum**



review_{PS3} **Need For Speed Undercover**



Crims with rims

Need For Speed Undercover

Because 'Need For A Sterner Challenge' wouldn't sell



he 12th Need For Speed may drip attitude like a punctured sump, but it has a guilty little secret. Underneath the game's massive Tri-City Bay setting, edgy cop-as-wheelman plot and its lock-up garage packed with more horsepower than the Middle Ages, Undercover desperately wants you to be its friend. It's writ large in the way the game can't seem to stop throwing gifts at you. 'Have some points.' Thank you. 'Hey, I've unlocked some new tuning packages - wanna come see?' Er, sure. 'How about a new car?' Well, okay, but shouldn't I get off the title screen first? When I came to turn off the PS3 after my first session I

half expected a 'What are you doing, Paul?' message to flash up on the XMB.

Still, if your ego is a parched sponge for casual flattery (and hey, whose isn't?) then initially this cuddle-the-player approach works quite well. Who cares if the first 20 or so races are actually quite hard to lose? What does it matter if, during most events, the massive, free-roaming city map is reduced to a carefully cordoned-off racing corridor that only gives the illusion of freedom? (If City Hall is organising illegal street racing now, doesn't that make it, y'know, legal?) And why quibble over homicidal cop cars that appear to have been launched from a distant super gun rather than using the traditional Tarmac-based method of interception? When every success brings with it a wave of adulation, freebies and vet another cut-scene featuring lingering shots of Maggie Q and her legs (she plays Chase Linh, your character's Federal handler) it's hard to find fault. It almost seems mean to.

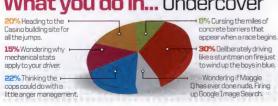
The problem is, like anything that comes a little too easily, success in Undercover begins to lose its value after a while. And before you know it, certain faults start to assert themselves and, at that point, no amount of body kits or Vaseline-lensed Maggie Q close-ups can fully compensate.

Blurred vision

Ironically, considering the game's unbridled generosity elsewhere, Need For Speed's new Heroic Driving Engine is surprisingly stingy with the frames per second during data-intensive action. Pick up serious speed or drive in the pack and the staccato visuals can be a pain to the point of hindering your ability to read the road ahead. It's a real shame because elsewhere Undercover is a handsome-looking game - all glinting metal and serotonin-spiking West Coast

Then there's Undercover's curious approach to player freedom. Pause to

What you do in... Undercover





look at the map and the scale of the Tri-City Bay area is truly impressive. Opt to duck out of the missions and you're free to explore all four regions of the map at your leisure. But where Burnout Paradise and Midnight Club Los Angeles make no distinction between the open city you drive around and the city you race through, Need For Speed Undercover gives you only as much access to its swooping asphalt, shortcuts and jump-rich building sites as it deems essential for your current mission. Happily this means 'access all areas' during Undercover's aggressively anarchic cop-themed events (and certain driver duels), but straight races see stern concrete barriers suddenly enclosing much of the race route. However well-intentioned this arbitrary lockdown on player freedom is, Midnight





Burnout Paradise

VERDICT 9

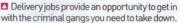
As quick as it's pretty, only let down by its

Midnight Club Los Angeles

Racing with plenty of muscle in a

pixel-perfect

VERDICT 9





Cars can take a staggering amount of damage before they give up the ghost, so ram away...

Cars can be tricked out until they look like four-wheeled drag queens."

Club's effective use of race-marking smoke flares demonstrates that it's totally unnecessary.

Good police

So Undercover - a bit weak then? Well, no, actually. For one thing, it's a definite improvement on its unwisely trackbased predecessor Pro Street, smartly returning to the punchy cops and robbers vibe of the best Need For Speeds. But mostly it's because the game offers a different experience to its rivals Midnight Club and Burnout. If you enjoy being stretched on a regular basis, if you relish those moments in racers when, nose bloodied by defeat, you have to dig deep and produce the drive of your life at your lowest ebb, then this is... probably **PlayStation**。

Undercover is a no-brainer. The cars from the 'basic' Lotus Elise to the ultra rare, prohibitively expensive Bugatti Veyron – are gorgeous and can be tricked out with aftermarket parts until they look like four-wheeled drag gueens. The events - combining a nice variety of traditional pack races with frantic police pursuits, damage missions (ram opponents to scrap or cause high-dollar damage to the city) and delivery gigs for underworld cohorts - come thick and fast, as do rewards in the form of new cars and stat-boosts, so boredom rarely gets a toehold. And, of course, as one of EA's tent pole franchises, the production values are super-slick throughout. It is, in short, the PS3 equivalent of a KFC

Boneless Bucket – very quick, no tough stuff to chew on, and it feels enjoyable in a dirty

sort of way. But whether or not that clinches Undercover for your collection will depend on your own appetite for a challenge. Paul Fitzpatrick

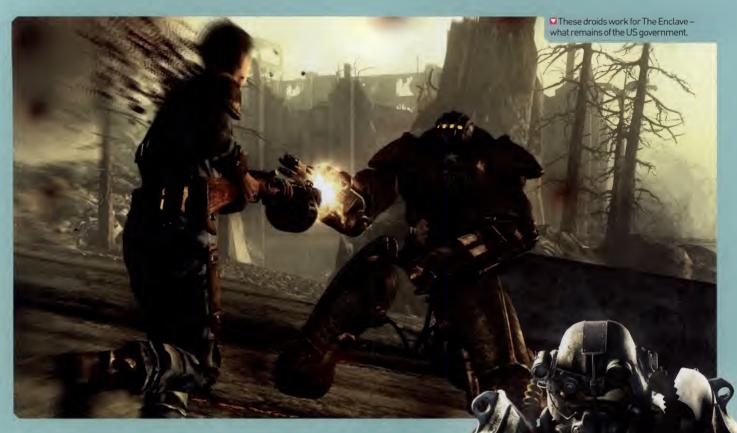






review PS3

Fallout 3



Apocalypse wow

Fallout 3

Bethesda's epic new RPG radiates quality



ometimes, you know straight away that you're in for the long haul. Not many games make you present at your own birth, then your first birthday, then your tenth, each occurring in the claustrophobic tunnels of the fallout shelter that you call home. But then Fallout 3 is all about the new and the weird, and its slow burn start is a clever way to set you up for post-apocalyptic life. On your first birthday you receive a book entitled 'You're Special' from which you get to pick special abilities. On your tenth, you get a BB gun from your dad, and learn how to shoot. As with Oblivion, Bethesda's 10/10-scoring RPG

predecessor, it's a frustratingly low-key opening, but as with that game it serves to make the moment you finally step out into the light all the more shocking. Having left the safety of Vault 101 you set off alone into an irradiated landscape populated by grisly survivors, cannibalistic super-mutants and slave traffickers. Worse, there appear to be no expensive French restaurants anywhere.

Up and atom

Set in 2277, two centuries after a nuclear war devastated the game's 1950's-style alternate version of America, Fallout 3 is way more than just an action RPG. It's a beautiful Frankenstein's bride sewn together from RPG, shooter and sandbox elements. Just surviving is a challenge at first because everything wants to kill you, from the overgrown scorpions to the drinking water. Eat and drink anything in the world and it raises your radiation levels. Go too nuclear and you're dead.

What you do in... Fallout 3

2% Lapping up toilet water like it's the finest Cristal and you're Jay-Z.
38% Feeling queasy after blasting another mutant into casserole.
28% Getting stabbyagainst sartorially challenged Raiders.

→ 3% Seeing the radioactive corpses of mole rats as a gourmet dinner option.

→ 7% Staring mournfully at Dogmeat's unused bowl in your Megaton house.

22% Hanging out with fugly but friendly ghouls in the city's history museum.

reviewPS3

Fallout 3



☐ The VATs targeting system enables you to shoot specific body parts to weaken foes



☐ The post-apocalyptic wasteland is filled with shanty towns and settlements full of survivors.

Having to worry about something as basic as drinking might sound like a pain, but it means there's a real sense of desperation every time you come across an abandoned house or a broken down Nuka Cola machine. You'll be gratefully sipping water out of dirty toilet bowls before you know it.

The main storyline is all about hunting for your missing dad, and even though it's fairly linear the range of missions keep pulling you forward, desperate to find out what sinister surprises lurk just over the next wind-blasted ridge. [Slight spoilers!] You'll meet DJ Three Dog and end up climbing the Washington monument to fix the mast for Galaxy New Radio so you can listen to Cole Porter tracks as you wander; visit a community of sentient zombies in the city's history museum; and, brilliantly, get trapped in a Matrixstyle simulation of the perfect, American suburban street.

The simulation, called Tranquillity Lane, is a standout moment for all the right reasons. It's strange and unnerving, and it's a world away from the scorched wasteland outside. Found inside another vault, it's a black and white '50s street.







"Side missions make the game feel like a real world rather than an irradiated film set."

The music in the background is light and iaunty, neighbours chat cordially, and a little boy sells lemonade from a stand outside his house. But it all turns out to be the work of a power-crazed genius, who will only allow you out if you shatter the idyll, breaking up marriages with carefully placed bits of lingerie, and making children cry before finally turning yourself into the 'Pint-Sized Slasher' - an alter-ego that sets about hacking the residents into mince. It's utterly sinister, I felt terrible, and it affected my karma too.

Good grief

☑ Super Mutants are

factions. Strong but

really stupid, they're

one of the main

Karma points rise every time you do something nice, such as helping a boy find his parents, and drop when you lie or steal. It's important because it dictates how other characters react to you, and who you can hire to join your fool's errand to find your missing father. Mercenary Jericho wouldn't let me hire him because I was just too much of a goody twoshoes. And while it sounds like moral window-dressing, it encourages you to decide what sort of person you'll be. You

can get through Fallout 3 being utterly despicable if you want, but I was nice and it had its upsides. Do something really good for the people of Megaton (hint: it involves the unexploded bomb around which the town is built) and they'll reward you with a house. Even better, it comes with a butler who can dish out purified water, style your hair and even tell jokes. Oh Wadsworth, you crack me up.

Saving (or, uh, vaporising) Megaton is just one of the game's wealth of side missions. They add hours to the game. and make it feel like a real world full of real personalities instead of an irradiated film set. In one such mission, the town of Grayditch has been overtaken by fire-breathing ants, and you end up risking a roasting in their nest. In another a vampiric group called The Family has been attacking a small town and you have to stop them with carefully chosen words or, more effectively, shotgun blasts to the face. For a time you also get the companionship and help of Dogmeat, a mutt you bump into randomly. We spent an hour taking down Super Mutants 🕨



review_{PS3}

Fallout 3





△ There are long-range weapons like sniper rifles, but nothing beats getting up close and personal with a laser pistol.



Radiation has wreaked havoc on nature. Giant ants, monster scorpions - it's all bad news.

Occasionally you'll discover creepy, abandoned towns - scorched reminders of a happier past.

Along with the guns, the gore is one of

the big differences from Bethesda's epic

fantasy RPG Oblivion. If that was a gentle

wander through a forest of unicorns, this is a harsh death march through a ruined

world. In fact, the only niggles in Fallout 3

are ghosts of that game: standing in front

of the entrance to Lamplight Caverns I

had a strong sense of déjà vu; the area

had pretty much been cut and pasted

from Oblivion. For a moment it wrenched

me from the world I'd spent six straight

hours in, and left me feeling like a kid

who's seen the wires at a magic show.

in what felt like a lifetime of adventure,

emotion and grungy combat. While the

only real innovation in Bethesda's RPG

make telling differences. The map is

formula is the so-so VATS, other tweaks

But that was one dark, stroppy moment

and sharing stimpacks, with him sniffing out drugs and ammo and boldly mauling bandits - a can-do attitude that soon got him killed. So, with heavy heart, I did what any apocalypse survivor would: I ate him. It's what he would have wanted. You won't survive for long in Fallout 3

without a decent weapon, and a lively array of shotguns, lasers, mini-nukes and the chance to make homebrew devices (Leaf Blower + Wood Chipper = Rock-It Launcher, a genius contraption that can fire lunchboxes, stuffed animals, anything) keeps combat fun. Come into it expecting precision and cover systems, though and you'll be disappointed; this just isn't that punchy. Fallout's muchtrumpeted Vault-Tec Assisted Targeting System (VATS) freezes the game and enables you to target specific areas of an enemy's body, with tricky shots given



Fallout 3's mutant vibe is far superior to Dark Sector's bu



poorer odds of hitting, but consequently greater damage if you do. You get around three shots per go, so you can wing a trio of enemies or concentrate fire on just one. It's particularly handy when a giant cat-like Death Claw is about to chew your chin off, but unless you're a tactics nut you'll have more fun without it. I only used it when I was low on health and ammo.

Perks in progress

Guns aren't your only hardware. A wrist-mounted device called a Pip Boy 3000 serves as your in-game guide. From here you manage your inventory, check active quests and even zip to locations you've already visited, saving hours of footwork. You use it to keep track of your character's stats too, which Fallout 3 happily keeps to a fun-friendly minimum. Every time you level up you get to choose a perk. Some are purely practical - Scrounger means you find bigger stashes of ammo - but others inject some comedy. Bloody Mess, for example, ups your attack damage, and dials up the

gore, so that enemies explode with enough blood

to drown a pony.

smaller than Oblivion's but it's more tightly packed with action and rounded characters. Add to that the PlayStation.

deeper dialogue, the giant toy box of weapons and the seeming endless choice of missions and you've got yourself a game that will keep on glowing all through Christmas.

Rachel Penny



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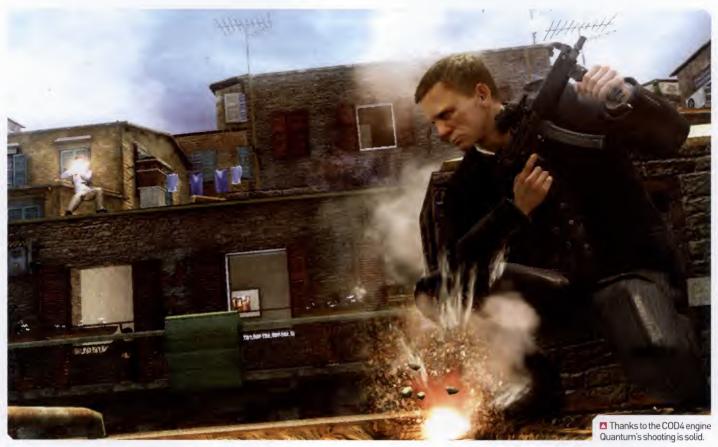
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review_{PS3} 007: Quantum Of Solace





Bourne again

007 Quantum Of Solace

It's double oh-kay but the 'Craig effect' is still absent

his is very disappointing, Mr Bond. Because, like Daniel Craig, the game is unfussy, muscular and efficient. But crucially, unlike the current 007, there's no complexity or flicker of passion lurking beneath the surface. Instead you get the overriding sense that this is the best game developer Treyarch could make given the compromises that **Bond**-o-Meter

inevitably come with tackling such a massive franchise. So while there's plenty of face time for virtual Craig, and mostly faithful set-piece interpretations of the finest bits from the first two flinty Bourne-influenced Bonds, you also get frequent bottlenecks of generic thugs padding out levels, a frustrating reliance on passing invisible thresholds to trigger the next showboating event, and some surprisingly lazy signposting ('Why is that chandelier above the terrorists' heads glowing... oh, riiight'). It is, in short, a big old mixed bag of Bond.

Quantum leap

That Quantum Of Solace remains as playable over its 15-mission length as it does is largely down to its genes. The game uses the superlative Call Of Duty 4: Modern Warfare engine, and while it's tempting to wonder why Activision didn't go the whole hog and employ that game's developer Infinity Ward as well, the



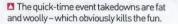
shooting is instantly, gratifyingly familiar to anyone who's played COD4. So shoot a mercenary and providing you hit body mass, he'll drop, cold. This is how shooters should be - how Bond should be. Combine these zero-tolerance physics with the game's generally canny enemy AI, and quickly, precisely thinning out enemy numbers from behind cover before they successfully outflank you is the stuff of empowering big-screen heroism. The weapons, too, are well balanced, favouring seriouslooking special-ops 'tools' that, on fully automatic fire, sound like the Grim Reaper blowing a hollow-point raspberry. You can carry a credible

007: Quantum Of Solace/Movies



⚠ When the action is focused, as in this sniper level, Quantum is better than its overall score.







■ Start taking serious damage and the iconic barrel-eye view begins to close in. Annoying!

"Graphically Quantum is mostly pretty like Rosa Klebb."

three weapons at any one time, swapping in superior models as and when you find them – and even when you don't, Bond's default sidearm (the Walther P99) feels reliably punchy in any gunfight.

Odd job

So the core shooting is solid - and that's no small victory for Activision's first Bond. But this is where the game's similarity to the mighty Call Of Duty 4 begins and ends. Graphically, Quantum is mostly pretty like Rosa Klebb or Odd Job's arse, and at times - like the frighteningly homely Bolivia tunnel mission - the comparisons are flattering. Textures tend to be poor to non-existent, water has the fluidity of parboiled lasagne and even the prettier of the levels look disconcertingly like they're made of granulated sugar.

The game is also lazily linear at times. Take the Casino Royale/
Hotel Splendide mission in Montenegro, where insurmountable obstacles such as laundry baskets placed mid-corridor and – gasp

- locked patio doors force 007 to take a ten-minute detour via ventilation ducts to a Baroque swimming pool inexplicably guarded by scores of men with automatic weapons and balaclavas. At times like these the temptation to show Quantum Of Solace the door is strong. And yet, for every daft bit of design, pointlessly generous quick-time event fight, shonky cut-scene or frustrating busywork battle, there's an energising section of room-to-room clearance, a tense sniper task or an entire mission that just works (tellingly, the best one of these is a train-based marathon that scarcely intersects with the films' plots at all). Oh, and not forgetting that underpinning it all there's the crisp, aggressive shooting.

So not the best Bond game by a good margin, but just about reason enough to be thankful that the stewardship of 007 has passed from

EA to Activision. But as for our vague hope that Quantum might finally lay the ghost of GoldenEye to rest, well, it seems that was very much premature.

Paul Fitzpatrick

BluMovies

HD films to feed your next-gen disc player



The Mist

Director Frank Darabont **Starring**Thomas Jane **ETA** Out now

Another Stephen King adaptation from the director of Shawshank, as monster-infested mist sweeps through a small town and the survivors trapped in a supermarket start to unravel. It's let down by some woeful CG, but this is a tough and cruel little horror film.



Naysayers pointed out that resurrecting Indy 19 years on was doomed to fail. Score one for the naysayers. While Ford's charismatic archaeologist generates near-limitless goodwill from the audience, the hokey plot, thrill-free CG and Harrison's decrepitude drain the well dry.



Hancock

Director Peter Berg **Starring** Will Smith, Charlize Theron **ETA** 1 Dec

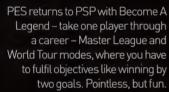
The nearly clever idea of having Will Smith as a lazy, functioning alcoholic superhero is ruined by a tidal wave-obvious twist and a trite ending that undoes anything smart that might have been going on. And by smart we mean super-powered dick and fart jokes.



reviewpsp

Head to head





096







Last year's handheld footy king returns with more licences, a fully fledged Be A Pro career and all the stuff that made it so good last time (Manager mode, a quiz mini-game). Strong, if a bit lazy.

Faster than its PS3 brother, this retains the classic PS2 engine – high-tempo passing, delicate shooting, bananas goalkeeping. The quicker pace is welcome but let down by the nub's inaccuracy.







Nicely honed. The default view enables you to see everything clearly (even on 'Wide' PES forces you to keep one eye on the radar), while passing, dribbling and shooting are a breeze.

French, Italian, Dutch leagues, 11 Spanish sides, Liverpool, Man Utd, 34 other club teams, and 21 nations including England, Scotland and... South Korea. No Champions League though.







With 30 leagues from around the world plus 41 nations, there are more teams than you could ever need. Because who doesn't want to see Chonbuk Motors vs lpatinga in handheld form?

Become A Legend is fun, but you won't be playing it for 12 weeks, let alone 12 months. And Master League remains the same as ever. Not fussed about team updates? Stick with PES 2008.







With a year on PS3 behind it, Be A Pro is more accomplished than PES's Become A Legend, and Interactive Leagues – play your club's real-life fixtures against other people – are great.

LOSE

A good value round of speedy, smooth, old-skool PES that's tough to find flaws with, yet a fair way off groundbreaking. Like Emile Heskey, this is a no-frills fan favourite.





WINNER



Like Konami, EA's plumped for a 'more of the same' approach. It's the best footy game on PSP, but isn't a big step up from last time out – and therefore stops short of a 9/10.



NINTENDO'S GRAND MASTER

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reviewPS2

Manhunt 2



198

Adult entertainer

Manhunt 2

Rockstar's slasher is finally unleashed, but can it still make the cut?

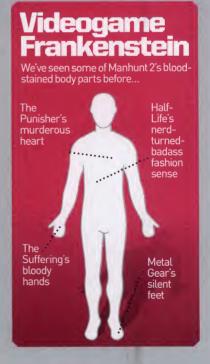
ou've seen worse. Despite all the fuss and the legal stalling and the horrified column inches from papers with nothing better to print, you could probably list, off the top of your head, several bits from games and about a hundred moments in films that are worse than anything in Manhunt 2. Sure, it's been slightly sanitised – the worst moments of the notorious executions are now scrambled or scuffed up or done in black and white (THQ's The Punisher did the same to please the BBFC), but they're still vicious enough to satisfy the gore hounds among you. And yep, there



are bits where a cackling maniac throws his own dirty fudge at you, and bits where you Jackson Pollock men's brains around a house while you're having flashbacks to your own demented past – but, fact is, they're just not that shocking. So what about the rest of the game?

Dirty gritty things

Well, Manhunt 2 does do its best to up the unpleasantness ante. Kills are more varied and more brutal – pens puncture kidneys and pliers rip out vertebrae, while aerial and environmental finishers let you machete men from above or crush their heads with manhole covers. Everything's deliberately nasty, too – if you're not hacking pimps to death in a brothel, you're gutting masked men in an underground snuff video ring. But the core of the game is unchanged: you hide in shadows, you tap on the walls, you chop men up (but never ladies). Complaints about the bad guys not being





reviewPS2

Manhunt 2



■ There are tons of ways to off bad guys including environmental kills like this manhole lid. Blerg!



As in the first game, stay in the shadows and you're invisible. Realistic? No, but it works.



☐ There are some great set-pieces but overall the first game pips this with its more focused plot.

able to see you when you're in the shade are inevitable, but unreasonable - if there wasn't a well-defined difference between being visible and hidden, the game would be unplayable. There is an effort to blur the boundaries with a quick-time event that kicks in if a bad guy comes prowling into the shadows on alert, but it wasn't really necessary. The radar's still excellent and the ability to use ambient noise to mask the sound of you smashing windows or heads is a nice touch. In short, the hide and seek gameplay is as solid as it was in the original. with sensible, smart alterations.

What isn't quite so consistent is the sense of pacing and direction.



Manhunt 2 isn't as appalling as the tabloids said, but it's heart is truly dark.



"Forget the cuts to the game - if you didn't know they'd happened you'd never guess."

The first Manhunt had a tailor-made narrator - Brian Cox as the brilliantly crazy 'director' - and a clever level structure driven by the game's different gangs. Manhunt 2's exposition is done by antihero Leo's unlovable pal Danny, the bad guys aren't as memorable and you'll see the plot twists coming a mile off. There are subtler problems too: although the speech is still sharper than in most games, there aren't the hundreds of lines the first game seemed to have, and hearing gurgling maniacs repeat themselves shatters the atmosphere. Some of the continue points are oddly-spaced, knackering brilliant moments of suspense by making you repeat them. And the aiming, though it's clearly

designed to maximise the he's-behindyou vibe, can annoy at times.

It takes outs

code-phrase being

All of this is frustrating, because Manhunt 2 aims to be much more than a blood-and-guts sequel, and PlayStation. it often comes achingly close to succeeding. Some of the set-pieces - such as the one where you're forced to shoot out speakers to stop a

broadcast over the airwaves - are genuinely inventive. Efforts to vary the surroundings - from a smutty cinema to a kids' TV show - really help the atmosphere. But the plot promises things it can't always deliver. There's a chilling moment, for example, when a child's voice pipes up - 'There's someone outside, daddy.' Your internal monologue insists that the man who comes out to investigate armed with a spade is an undercover bad guy, and so, you duly Biro him to death, but you aren't quite sure if he was innocent... and it's never touched on again. The game builds to a climax, but it just can't match the furious assault on the director's mansion that served as the last game's exclamation point.

So forget the coverage and the court cases. Forget the cuts - if you didn't know they'd happened, you'd never quess. The fact is, Manhunt 2 is a little bit disappointing, but only because it's competing against a predecessor that was genuinely ground-breaking. Plenty

of games chuck in buckets of gore in an effort to sell, but

very few put the effort into everything else that Manhunt 2 does. If you're a horror geek, you'll have seen worse. But you won't often have seen much better. Joel Snape



reviewPS3 Call Of Duty: World At War





Slight return

Call Of Duty World At War

Tonight we're going to party like it's 1945

odern Warfare was always going to be a hard act to follow, which is maybe why Treyarch chose to make Call Of Duty 3.5 instead of Call Of Duty 5. But even after a year off, World War 2 feels tired. When the brief opening prologue level gives way to the game's first big set-piece - another bloody beach landing - it's almost impossible to get excited. Yes it's frenzied with lots of shouting and bullet-torn casualties slumping lifelessly to the floor, but come on - again? Rewinding the series back to the Second World War was risky enough without opening up recently-healed clichés.

Here we go again

But while the return to WW2 is a step backwards in more ways than one, the panicky, overwhelming action still delivers a punch. Reprising the old guns jars, but not as much as you might think, mainly because there suddenly seem to



be a lot more WW2 machine guns to play with. Even single-shot bolt action rifles have a rewarding lethality to them: one shot, one kill. At its best the feeling of power, combined with the pounding barrage of noise and flames, means that even 'old' COD can still serve up some kickass fire fights.

By far the best levels involve the Russian attack on Berlin, largely because the confined urban environments hem in the otherwise messy level design and channel the action into a tightly focused rush. It builds from a moody opening where you escape Nazis by playing dead among corpses (lifted straight from sniper flick Enemy At The Gates) into an attention-grabbing escape through a ruined building while the enemy torch the place around you. Later battles – as you wage war in the German capital's streets, pushing back the remnants of the Third Reich inch by bitter inch - are probably the game's

finest. There's a great sense of impetus to the conflict as the enemy buckle and retreat, pursued by your roaring, bloodthirsty comrades.

By contrast, the American campaign, fighting the Japanese in the Pacific, is a mix of hyperbole, busywork and woolly level design. It starts with a dramatic crescendo in the form of a prison camp escape and simply never lets up, with the result that it becomes hard to care about shooting your way through another desperately outnumbered encounter when it's your third in as many hours. There are endless explosions, enemies and challenges. The tick list of things to do - destroy three tanks, take out four mortar pits, etc - feels like unnecessary busywork that obstructs the far more enjoyable shooting men bit.

The American levels also swing unpredictably between heart-pounding action and chaos. At its most hectic, attacks come confusingly from all angles

The first five levels



SEMPER FI

Just to emphasise who the new bad guys are, the opening level sees you captured and tortured by the Japanese, before being rescued by Kiefer Sutherland and shooting your way to freedom



LITTLE RESISTANCE

Once rescued, your first job is to front up the US assault on the to call in rocket strikes to take out fortifications and head inland



HARD LANDING

With the beach secure you then battle across the island of Peleliu are prepared to die protecting it so every step is a struggle



VENDETTA

your slaughtered comrades. After meeting a sniper called Reznov nigh-ranking German officer



THEIR LAND, THEIR BLOOD

With the tide of war turning, the Soviets invade Germany. It's the beginning of the end for Adolf. After fighting through forests you eventually reach Berlin and take the final battle to the streets.



Gary Oldman's bloodthirsty Sergeant Reznov guides you through the Russian campaign.



■ Multiplayer smartly replicates COD4's ace setup, while poor balancing spoils the co-op.





and you'll often die because of something you never saw coming. The Japanese battle tactics might be authentic but they make for a frustrating challenge. Suicidal Banzai attacks see troops charging en masse, while others jump up suddenly from camouflaged foxholes or snipe, semi-hidden, from the trees. Any one of which spells 'game over' if it catches you unprepared, and with so much going on it's easy to get caught out.

Shell shock

Perhaps the biggest disappointment is the total lack of emotional engagement. There are only two named characters amongst the wash of faceless extras. Kiefer Sutherland's gruff GI is essentially a disembodied voice because you can never tell which shouty angry American he actually is. And while Gary Oldman's bolshy Russian sniper is easier to spot, thanks to a distinctive big beard and hat combo, he never shuts up about you being a 'hero of Russia'. It's amazing how being constantly told how awesome you are makes you feel exactly the opposite.

Play these



Bioshock Admittedly not a war shooter, but the brilliant

VERDICT 10



Call Of Duty 4 If you've never experienced COD4 then you've missed one of the greatest shooters ever. VERDICT 10

"Compared to Modern Warfare World At War is loud and crass."

At least the multiplayer is as testing and as invigorating as ever. Mainly because it's exactly like COD4, mirroring the perks, XP and levelling system, only in WW2. Admittedly, calling in recon planes instead of UAVs feels strange and unlocking etched glass sights instead of a red dot is stretching things, but it works. Far worse is the co-op mode which lets four people play together on or offline. While we only sampled it offline in split-screen, the short draw distance and unbalanced gameplay ruined the fun. The real surprise is the Zombie Nazi

bonus mode unlocked on completion. It has you in a bunker, fighting waves of zombies and using money earned from kills to buy weapons and reinforce barricades. It's addictive, exciting, atmospheric and a highlight of the package.

While World At War is enjoyable it's the basic Call Of Duty formula that keeps it strong - something that Infinity Ward's COD4 refined, focusing the gunplay within a compact narrative. Treyarch, on the other hand, has gone for a kitchen sink approach with World At War throwing everything it could think of at the gameplay, rather than improving it. So you get flamethrowers, things to blow up every five minutes, blood, gore and overblown machismo. Compared to COD4's night vision house search or Chernobyl sniper mission, this is loud and crass. It's also shorter.

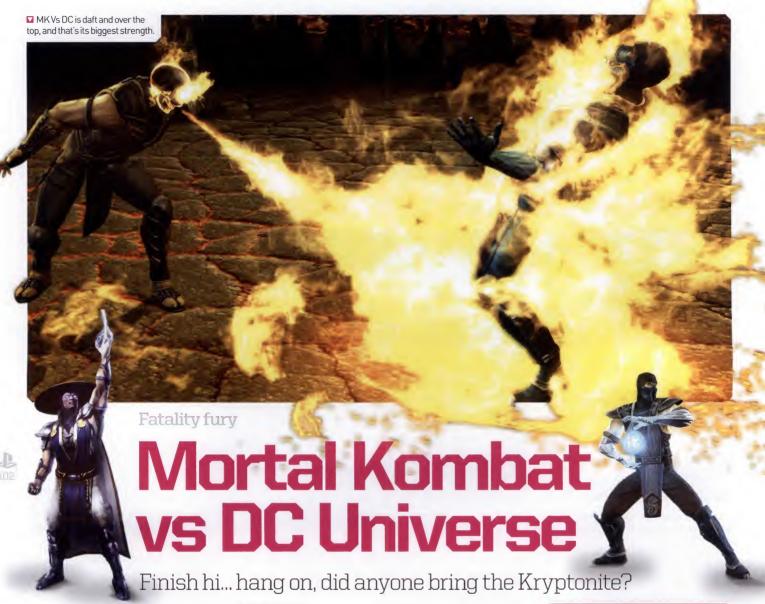
clocking in at around seven hours. It's far from broken and has some undeniably great moments but, for the first time in the series, it feels like the quality has perceptibly dipped. Leon Hurley

PlayStation.

1

reviewPS3

Mortal Kombat Vs DC Universe



ust so you don't have to wonder, MK vs DC knows exactly how stupid it is. 'Interdimensional combat essence? Riiight,' snorts Green Lantern after someone explains the plot, which is all to do with Superman's heat vision causing a malfunction in an interdimensional boom tube and releasing energy that makes everyone really angry and drains certain characters' powers so that Liu Kang can fight Wonder Woman and... you know what? Just leave it there. The plot's stupid. It was always going to be stupid. Green Lantern's speech is as close as you're going to get to the writers actually apologising for it. Let's move on.

The fact is, switching your brain off is essential to enjoying MK vs DC. Mortal Kombat didn't ever have the Swiss-watch balance of Tekken or Virtua Fighter, but this instalment ditches any attempts to be clever in favour of gameplay that a goldfish could grasp. Grab an opponent

Like this? Play these



Marvel vs Capcom 2 Ace 2D graphics enhance frenetic actio that sees the two franchises face off.

VERDICT 8



Soulcalibur IV
The fighting rocks and
Character Creation
means you can make
your own heroes.
VERDICT 9

or kick him off a ledge and you're lobbed into a quick game of rock-paper-scissors to see who does the most damage. Punch him through a wall and you can hammer the buttons to dish out extra bruises. Both moves create jarring contrasts to the actual fighting and they're absolutely infuriating against computer opponents on harder difficulties (they just counter whatever you do, instantly). But at least they get the idea of superheroic battling across properly. Oh, and then there's the new 'Rage' system – pull off enough moves and you can hammer the buttons to get all angry, which does extra damage unless your opponent back flips away, which he will unless he's an idiot. It's not exactly chess.

But then, this isn't really a game aimed at people who understand or care about the fine art of guard-buffering and frame-counts. If you're a DC fan who can



resist grinding your teeth when people say things like "I'll search Metropolis for Superman!" - he's got super-hearing, genius, just shout - then there's a good chance you'll enjoy MK vs DC. Batman's gritty, The Flash is nippy, Superman's as super as he can get without hopelessly outclassing everyone else and Catwoman's terrifying cleavage just about distracts you from her irritating voice and wonky jawline. Their special abilities are imaginatively done too. Best is the Joker, with his razor-cards, joy-buzzer and comedy bombs, but even boring old Captain Marvel gets a lightning-bolt bear-hug. And yes, there is strategy in the way you use these moves,





but it's less about stringing them together - don't want to put the noobs off - than learning the best ways of catching opponents off-guard. Oh, and in case you're wondering - of course you are - the series infamous Fatalities are most definitely in. The Kombatant crew are as ruthless as ever, and the DC villains, while not quite as nasty, still manage to snap necks and torch opponents. The DC heroes get 'Heroic Brutalities', but they're still pretty vicious – Batman straps a sonic device to opponents and covers them in bats, while Superman simply bludgeons them into the dirt.

Joker's wild

The problem is, it's all a tiny bit unbalanced. The MK characters aren't too bad – Midway has been tweaking them for years, after all.

Certain DC characters are copied straight from absent Kombatants (Lex Luthor, for instance, is almost exactly the same as rocket-launching

robot Sektor) so they're

not too bad either. But



☐ The DC villains are better than the superheroes, and Joker is the best of them.

some of the others are just hopeless.
All of The Flash's specials involve
him running straight forward or
back, making him pretty onedimensional – especially compared
to Green Lantern, whose magic
hammer goes through almost any
attack and does preposterous
amounts of damage. Advanced
combos take timing so ridiculously
precise that it's barely worth doing
them, especially when you consider
the amount of damage they

do. So MK might be
aware of how silly it is,
then but that doesn't
excuse or explain
all of its problems.
Oh, and where the
hell is Aquaman?

Joel Snape

JapanWatch

This month's overseas action in a nutshell

Yuusha no Kuse ni Namaikida Or 2

Format PSP Pub Sony Subtitles No.

This Dig Dug-alike puzzler combines two of our passions: playing bad guys and masochistically lo-fi graphics that give bad gameplay no place to hide. The premise is idiot simple – spawn subterranean monsters to attack dogooder heroes out to kill the Devil. Nicely stretches you rather than your PSP.









Kenka Banchou 3: Zenkoku Seiha

Format PS3 Pub Spike Subtitles No

functional) morality-o-meter.

Takashi Sakomoto interprets his career counsellor's advice to 'find an ambition' as an invitation to kick the crap out of bruisers at high schools around the country in order to become the All-Japan Junior Yakuza don.

Scores an impressive 8.7 on our (barely

In this beat-'em-up teenager

Exotic Boxart Of The Month



sanji Sekai Junjo sen 1946 Hard to I this hasyou dismantling here, bu i's armed forces post-face, we

mantling here, but from the look on he spostiolent, surprise hug has just taken a lithic lithigus wrong turn into furn fetish sex pest territory.



Hayarigami 2 Portable

Because there is love in our hearts we choose to believe this is a house renovation sim and not the shattering festival of hacked limbs it probably is.

reviewPS3 Socom Confrontation



Grizzled veteran

Socom Confrontation

Where death absolutely is the end



ow much you like Socom largely depends on whether you enjoy watching other people playing it. Because that's what you'll spend a lot of time doing. Unlike other multiplayer shooters, where you get reincarnated like a trigger-happy Buddhist, Socom has always built its gameplay around *not* respawning. You've only got one life; fail to look after it and you'll spend the rest of the match in spectator mode, watching the survivors slug it out. And this time it's online only, so there's no single-player campaign to turn to if you can't hack it.

It's actually not that irritating if you've got a little patience because most rounds



are over pretty quickly, so you'll never be on the bleachers for long. What you get in return is a real hit of adrenaline. With the respawning safety net pulled out from under you, suddenly everything's more tense. This is the first time the phrase 'check those corners' has actually carried any weight. Just peaking around a wall using Sixaxis - wait! It works suddenly becomes a heart stopper, knowing that a single ringing gunshot can end it all.

Hang in there

The game modes capitalise on the lethal gameplay, forcing you to stick together to stay alive. It's more of a panicked huddle than genuine organisation but compared to the usual multiplayer free-for-all it feels decisive – teams constantly clashing over objectives, flashpoints regularly erupting. For

example Breach games have one team trying to blast through barricades to destroy a target while the other side patrol the perimeter, trying to secure it. Control on the other hand is a territorial mode where teams fight to capture nodes around the map. The most panicky (ie best) set ups, however, are either Escort or Extraction. Both involve a team trying to protect or kill VIPs, depending on which side they're on. The first sees a team trying to shepherd their charges across the map safely while the latter involves a team trying to rescue hostages.

Socom Confrontation



☑ With up to 32 people in a match the action is crowded, hectic and loads of fun.



■ You'll only take cover behind a car once. Massive explosions tend to stick in your memory.

PlayStation

The map design goes a long way to keep things exciting by creating large, multi-levelled arenas. There are no areas with an obvious tactical advantage and the open feel only adds to the sense of vulnerability. It's a shame it's not prettier, though. Poor textures and models are in abundance. This might be a PS3 update of a PS2 classic but it certainly doesn't look the part.

Make a connection

It's also surprisingly fiddly to get a game because you can't just jump in. Instead you have to choose a 'Channel' (effectively a lobby) from various territories. Then you have to pick a game, then wait for it to load and finally hang around for the match to finish so you can join the next round. We imported our early copy from the US, so had to endure American-dominated servers

where the word 'faggot' was used so frequently as to become mere punctuation. There's also a limit to how much someone can vell "Green



You can customise every element of your soldier, from his face to guns and armour.

up bitch!' as a game starts before you want to quit out. But it creates a dilemma: suck it up or spend ten minutes trying to find a fresh match.

It's a shame because the action really does have its moments. It's got a serious edge. You can adjust every aspect of your loadout, changing everything from primary and secondary weapons, armour, attachments and head gear to camo type and colour, and explosives. But it's also taut and pacey which, combined with the constant

> awareness of your virtual mortality, makes for exciting shoot-outs. It's just a shame it hasn't got a faster, snappier matchmaking system.

Leon Hurley



Godspeed On The Devil's Thunder

Dani Filth and friends return with an album dedicated to 15th century satanist Gilles de Rais. Cradle, though, play their devilish black metal with tongues-firmly-in-cheek, and songs like Tragic Kingdom match barbed wickedness with melodrama. myspace.com/cradleoffilth



Cradle Of Filth

Crazy Cousinz Bongo Jam

Format Track ETA Out now Price £0.79

Being, essentially, a man describing how he likes to wake up and play some bongos, this won't win any prizes for complexity. But this funky house anthem has already swept parties from Ibiza to Malia, and unless you're missing a gene you won't be able to resist shaking a leg. myspace.com/crazicousinz



back issues

Feed vour obsession



Issue #018 Mav 2008

- Grand Theft Auto IV
- Mirror's Edge
- Gran Turismo 5: Prologue
- How Blu-ray won the HD war



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- MGS4 review & retrospective
- Race Driver Grid
- Street Fighter IV
- Resident Evil 5



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- 007: Quantum Of Solace
- **Ultimate GTA IV guide**
- Haze Far Crv 2



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- Killzone 2
- Future of shooters special
- David Jaffe interview
- LittleBigPlanet

Back issues

Late to the party? There's no need to miss out...



Issue #022 September 2008

- Mirror's Edge
- Resident Evil 5
- Access All Areas @ E3
- Soulcalibur IV



Issue #023 October 2008

- Street Fighter special
 Mercenaries 2: World In Flames
- Hideo Kojima interview



Issue #0<u>2</u>4 November 2008

- LittleBigPlanet
- Operation Flashpoint 2: Dragon Rising
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- PES 2009



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- Resistance 2
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fun, left us feeling that maybe Neversoft hadn't quite 'got' Guitar Hero after taking what have they done with World Tour? Delivered a radical overhaul of the series that doesn't so much answer Rock

formula changes, just brilliant, musicon form, mixing crowd pleasers like Jackson's Beat It and Survivor's Eye like Modest Mouse's Float On or L'Via L'Viaquez by the The Mars Volta. Best of you've never heard of suddenly become essential. In our case, Hushpuppies and rotation right now. There's a leaning towards shouty rawk - MC5, Black Label Society, Tool, Ted Nugent - but the set

The new vocals and drums slot in easily next to guitar and bass - as Rock

What you do in... World Tour 13% Customising your rocker: spiked collar, '80s fringe and velvet jacket. We're pioneering

trying Expert but chickening out. **40%** Trying to stop everyone hitting buttons at once and quitting out of multiplayer. 7% Stringing three 10% Eye Of The Tiger. Again!

notes together in the Recording Studio and then needing a little lie down.

ine UK

PlayStation_®Offi

The recording Studio

No High School Musical in the set list? Do it yourself



Cut the track

In the studio you can use a guitar to put down the rhythm, lead and bass. You can also lay down the drums using either a guitar or the drum kit. There are no vocals, though.



In the mix

Once you've got your track down you can transfer it all to GHmix to edit and tidy up any loose notes. You can also change any effects you've added.



Play away

Once you've finished your song you can play it like any other track in Guitar Hero. All you have to do is create the music - the game will automatically convert it into a GH song.



Download a number one

You can publish anything you create to GHTunes. It uses a similar community system to LittleBigPlanet with user feedback promoting good songs and burying the bad.



ost songs play out in a gig setting, apart from ionally bizarre and trippy nightmares



There are wealth of options to customise your character's hair, clothes and movement.



"It's a radical overhaul for the series that more than answers Rock Band's challenge."

Band proved, the whole fake band thing works. Wisely, World Tour has been rival's lead rather than trying to be different for the sake of it. As you play, the quitar, drums and bass tracks scroll everyone 'plays' their prompts correctly as they pass the line, and the singer hits enough notes, then the Rock Meter stays green, the song plays and everyone's meter too far into the red, and it's all over, usually to the sheepish refrain of,

Greatest hits

Generally the new peripherals feel good in hand. The drums are sturdy enough to take a beating while softer pads mean it's quieter to play. We're not convinced by the Not good for something that's going to be stamped on a lot. It hasn't broken yet, but we've got a sweepstake going that



ranges from 'tomorrow' to 'next week' which gives you some idea of how optimistic we are for its survival. The new quitar has had a subtle but intelligent with a widerstrum bar and new buttons. The select/Star Power switch is now a fat bridge-like pad that sits comfortably in Pause buttons. The new touch pad, play certain sequences either by tapping or sliding your finger over it. It works but there's no tactile feedback to tell you where you are, or if you're using enough pressure, so you never feel confident with it. Although using it to add wah-wah effects over long notes is a great touch.

World Tour's greatest strength, of

course is, as a multiplayer game. On PS3 it really doesn't get much better than the a song blast out of the telly because you're 'playing' it, and doing it all with your (almost certainly sloshed) friends. The songs balance out well across the instruments for the most part. Drums, vocals, guitar and bass are all kept busy, avoiding some of the problems the first Rock Band encountered where tracks had epic chunks of silence to endure for

Feel the noise

There are a few issues with the drums. though. Playing Beat It is metronomic torture thanks to a repetitive rhythm that never changes for the entire song While challenging singing. A few of the odd

Guitar Hero World Tour





song choices (*Sting*?!) soon start to make sense when you've had your fill of bawling your way though Motorhead's Overkill.

If you're a Satriani-style soloist you'll be glad to know that World Tour is still great fun as a single-player game. Play on your own and it's classic Guitar Hero – you, a list of songs to autistically master, and a blossoming blister on your thumb. Career mode now takes place through a range of gigs with three to six songs to perform. There are always several choices available, so unlocking everything is a lot friendlier with no more grinding to a halt over one tricky song or playing the same track repeatedly. Everything you unlock can also then

☐ The horrible boss fights from GH III have been replaced by far more enjoyable duels.

"When you're happy you can publish your track online for others to play."

The big shake up for World Tour, though, is the Recording Studio. It's a fully functional sequencer that lets you play and record samples through the Guitar Hero instruments to create new songs which you can then play in-game or upload. There are numerous guitar sounds, drum kits and effects to choose from which can be played 'live' in the studio. Once you've got a rough track down you can then clean it all up in GHMix, tightening loose notes or deleting cock-ups. When you're done it then becomes a playable song with the game using processing witchcraft to create an accompanying Guitar Hero track to play along to at any difficulty. Then, when you're happy, you can publish it online for other people to play.

Sing a song

The studio is a powerful tool but don't expect to fill the void left by the glaring lack of Simon & Garfunkel in the GH catalogue just yet. Like

LittleBigPlanet the scope is

just about anything, and you can fully expect to see some amazing versions of familiar songs, but you'll need to put the hours in. Even a simple track takes ages. We managed a surprisingly good version of Seven Nation Army by the White Stripes, thanks to its distinctive distorted hook, but our version of The National's Mr November didn't fair so well. None of the guitar or drum sounds matched the song and the chord inversions are limited. So while the Fm, A, D, C#m we'd worked out from the original song was a descending progression, Guitar Hero could only play it going up. Basically, they were the right chords, but the game couldn't make them sound right.

But whether you feel like touching the Recording Studio or not there's no denying this is the best Guitar Hero yet. It's a huge update for the series, with a great list of songs, that puts it

back on top as the best
music game around
without changing any of
the stuff that made it
great. So while it's a close
call, it means that Guitar
Hero World Tour is our
number one. **Leon Hurley**



be played in Quick Play.

Rock Revolution



Power struggle

Rock Revolution

Sixth form band tries to play with the big boys



is a seismic change in the way things are done, which this also-ran guitar and drums fumble definitely isn't. Instead it's Konami's effort to catch up with the rock band on, it falls off again, and here's why.

Firstly, while you can play guitar, bass and drums, you can't sing. Considering what the other rock It feels like a massive tease to have Iron Maiden's Run To The Hills on the tracklist but not be able to sing it. Secondly there are 41 tracks on the disc, less than half Rock Band 2's 84 or Guitar Hero World Tour's 86, and they're almost all cover versions. Decent ones, yes, but they still feel cheap when Rock Band and Guitar Hero are stuffed with real artists.

tracklist, the song selection

is actually pretty solid. There's proper rock like Deep Purple's Highway Star and Cream's White Room, newer stuff like The Killers' Somebody Told Me and Reputation and The Ramones' Blitzkrieg Pop. So it's a shame that Rock Revolution

up Guitar Hero or sat down with those two games - and thankfully the

belt fret board sliding towards the front of Revolution has a vertical set of 'lanes' just left of centre that give you much less time be playing. You feel partially sighted, like

as disappointing. We imported the game before



△ There's plenty to do on the drumming side of things, but it feels more like actual work than fun



△ The characters take themselves far too seriously. They're clearly too cool for us.



main drums and a kick pedal - but the game was clearly designed with cross compatibility in mind as there's an option to switch from seven to five. Which would be fine if the only other peripheral on the market was the original Rock Band kit Revolution was being made. But the Rock Band 2 and Guitar Hero World Tour kits each have six parts. This is confusing, but not insurmountable - unlike the fact that the orange kick pedal is tracked in the seems to be no logical connection makes. Obviously we've yet to play it with the bespoke drums, but it's hard to see how that would fix these problems.

characters look like the kind of rock knobs you'd find sipping wine in the VIP

lounge at Reading - and with

falls way short of its rivals. tracks, but they're no fun more likely to sober you up than get your party started. Helen Woodey









Sophomore album

Rock Band 2

Death to X-Factor! This is Saturday night entertainment



hort-term pain for long-term your local enema clinic, but it also suits Harmonix's latest supergroup simulator. And consider yourselves warned that the pain manifests itself both physically – when your super-weak calf pedal, or when your knuckles bleed from punching a wall after failing Cheap Trick's brutally fast Hello There on Expert for the discover that, like its predecessor, the

It's the worst thing about RB2, and once you get past it this is a tremendous party game. Long-term gain, remember. So: last time around, brilliant songs like Radiohead's Creep were swiftly relegated from "do-that-one-do-thatone!" to "not-a-f***ing-gain!" status as the game forced you to play them over when touring. Except no rock band in history has ever built a fanbase on murdering Garbage's I Think I'm Garbage struggled doing it once.

Harmonix has ditched RB1's solo tour mode, so now you can blast through the want to stick to one discipline like singing. You can also hire different staff - for gigs - but otherwise it's the same as songs and setlists. And yes, (or rather, and again. Float On by Modest Mouse, previously one of my favourite songs of

Devtalk 'We're far from done. We see all kinds of new opportunities game mechanics and ways of

Happy thoughts Yet once you've slogged through the tour through, to the point that it's arguable as to whether a game like this even needs a round for a night of SingStar and telling them that they'll have to sing Beautiful Day six times before you can do Don't Stop Me Now.) It's a point hammered home by the amazing wealth of DLC on offer. For £2.49 you can purchase a bought) for use in RB2. That gives you a game, 84 on the RB2 disc, and over 300 a US profile you'll have to wait for the UK



gathering together as a community." **Greg LoPiccolo** development, Harmonix

Rock Band 2



servers to go live to access these extras.)

Crucially, it's also easy to pick up and play. By tying instruments to specific characters (and characters to specific bands) and making its menu system unnecessarily convoluted, just getting four people into a song on the original game felt like trying to walk a tangled quartet of string puppets through a revolving door. Now you can jump in at any point as your created alias or a CPU-generated character, pick an instrument and difficulty setting, and rock. Gameplay remains of the press-corresponding-button-on-conveyor-belt-at-right-moment format, but it works so well that we're happy to see it unchanged. Plus, if you're fed up with your mates endlessly cramping your style (put the drumsticks DOWN

■ Nailing every note as a four-piece is one of the most fulfilling PS3 experiences going.



Nathan), you can switch on No Fail mode and just play the song withou the risk of an abrupt ending. Great.

Instrumental time

Peripherals-wise, the drums, guitars, and mic are all compatible with Guitar Hero World Tour, and vice versa. This is particularly handy because a) you don't need to invest in yet another guitar if you already own GH, and b) the GH controller is superior to the still-a-bit-flimsy

Rock Band axe. The new drum kit deserves a big-up, too: it's smart and holds up well to the hammering you'll give it, with panels that are significantly quieter than last time around – so you'll

no longer get the neighbours nailing dead sparrows to the door as a warning after your drunken drum fills on Roxanne.

But should you buy it over Guitar Hero? It's a tough question because for all those tour mode frustrations, the seamless integration of its previous content is a massive boon for Rock Band 2 that gives it depth Guitar Hero can't offer yet. At the same time, it lacks Hero's recording studio, which has the potential to be

unspeakably huge. Gameplay-

that we recommend you do a little research into their respective tracklists and go with the one you like best. It really is that simple, and you won't be disappointed. Ben Wilson





Alone In The Dark: Inferno





▲ "Argh! Fire! I'd better smash this door down with this big red metal tube thing I seem to have."



▲ Combat is mostly clumsy swinging, but when you do finally connect it's satisfyingly crunchy.

Rocky horror

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Alone In The Dark Inferno

Atari's walk in the park finally arrives on PS3

hat's more important: that Alone In The Dark tries, or that it fails? If you only like winners, you'll hate it, because this is a game that tries plenty, but misses the target as

While games such as LittleBigPlanet and Echochrome attempt to rewrite the rules, the majority of new releases seem content to hone (or you might say 'regurgitate') the same old staples. Give most designers a fancy new physics engine and they will, it seems, use it to make crates collapse and barrels explode really picely.

In your hunt to uncover a dark secret hidden in New York's Central Park, Alone In The Dark isn't ploughing a new furrow,



but it does redecorate an old one nicely. It makes its physics engine matter, for a start. Can't find a key? Swing an axe at a door and it eventually splinters. Shoot the lock and it blows right off, leaving the door flapping. Do this to a metal security door and little happens beyond a bit of light bending. Tape a homemade bomb to the lock, however, and you're through... the world (mostly) follows real-life rules, allowing progress via your own logic rather than having to learn the game's. When this happens, it's a pleasure.

Odd job Eddie

Even your character, paranormal investigator Edward Carnby, (mostly) obeys the rules. Hammering a door in with a heavy object doesn't mean pressing **(X)** – you swing the object back and forth with the analogue stick. Shovels and burning chairs are swung in a similar fashion, while cables can be pulled around, hooked over things and shot from their fixings to provide electricity, safety or climbing PlayStation. ropes. You even combine the ordinary items Carnby finds – no sticky mines and flashbang caches here - to create your own weapons, like vodka-andhankie Molotov cocktails.

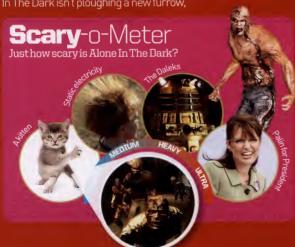
The trouble starts when the trouble starts. Combat is wretched, especially against monsters who are only vulnerable to fire – swipe them with a burning stick and they die pathetically easily, but if there's no time to equip the right things, you're utterly screwed. And when this happens, it's hateful. Increasingly they knock weapons from your grip, too, leading to ludicrous bouts of run-and-fetch. Worse, there's almost no relationship between the controls and the healing/weapon-waving movements, item management can be nearly impossible because it remains in real-time, and many of the puzzles obstacles, really - are neutralised by unskippable camera flyby 'hints' so laboured as to be actively patronising.

And it's not scary. At all. If developer Eden Games dropped the horror clichés, rubbish enemies, dire combat and dreary boss battles, it'd have a great disaster survival game full of collapsing

skyscrapers, widening abysses and teetering buses...

instead of the neardisaster of a game that this is. But even so, Alone In The Dark does, at least, try. You've got to give it that.

Steve Williams



Moto GP 08/Kickings



Dirty torque

Moto GP 08

Bike to the future

otorbikes are amazing! They're stupidly quick, have engines that sound like a vengeful chorus of Old Testament angels, and Steve McQueen singlehandedly defeated the entire Nazi war machine in one. So why are most bike games about as thrilling as eating celery? Because they make the iron horses too hard to handle. offer up a drab selection modes and fail to deliver a ball-tightening sense of speed. (Hello, SBK 08).

Moto GP doesn't do any of this. Its handling is geared to be more arcade-like than realistic, making it accessible and, crucially, fun. The ludicrous detail on the bikes would make even Polyphony Digital proud, and the acceleration is nothing short of searing. All of which, coupled with the responsive controls, makes for a satisfying ride.

Lap it up

It's not quite Turismo on two wheels - the bikes feel too loose and insubstantial for that - but the racing is still tight and tactical, with 35 riders jostling and slip-streaming to gain track position. The aggressive AI pursues you like Rutger Hauer in The Hitcher, making races engaging enough to stop the career mode from becoming a slog.

There's also the challenge mode, which serves up 50 objective-based missions. Being thrown into last place with only two





Going first-person makes it hard to see, but feels fast like you're travelling through time



■ Wet races can devolve into a deadly circus. of unseated racers spiralling through the air.

laps to go and visibility-ruining HD raindrops to deal with, for example provides stacks of just-one-more-go appeal. We'd be happier if the frame rate didn't stutter like a cartoon pig on busier corners, and judged against the entire racing genre it's

beaten comfortably by the likes of GRID, GT5 Prologue and the new Motorstorm, but in terms of dedicated PS3 bikers, this is the only one that's worth a spin.

David Meikleham



Straight to bargain bin

With Nathan Ditum



I've not seen the summer blockbuster on which The Mummy: Tomb Of The Dragon Emperor is based, but I'm quessing it didn't feature graphics so lo-res they look like a therapist's flipbook and motion sickness camerawork that hits vomit pitch every time there's a bit of shooting. The whole thing is set up like an idiot's crayon version of Uncharted - the climbing stuff is okaay but horribly let down by. well, everything, but specifically by voice acting so

devoid of charm or feeling it sounds like it was recorded under duress and possibly at gunpoint. 'You'd-have-done-better-staying-in-bed... today.' not-Brendan Fraser says. Yeah, on most days, actually.

Space Chimps has at least one thing going for it: the fact that monkeys in astronaut outfits are always, always funny. And also sad, if you've ever seen the black and white archive footage of the special NASA monkeys who never came home, which reaches a sort of unbearable tragicomic transcendence, or if you ever accidentally play this game and wonder why everything is so sodding brown (I'm totally tired of pointing out that things are brown - what the hell's



wrong with cyan? Or puce?) and why the graphics blink on and off every time you pick something up and why the girl monkey with long hair makes you feel funny inside in an evolution-challenging way. Would I rather fantasise about a lady primate than ever play this again? Clearly - next.



Hannah Montana: Spotlight World Tour isn't a karaoke game, and it's not a dancemat game. It's a game you play with the Sixaxis because, if eight-year-old girls like anything, it's absolutely not singing or dancing, but pretending to sing and dance using arbitrary turns and clicks of the analogue sticks. Right? The worst thing about it all is that each dancing instruction has been recorded just once in an existentially devastating and vacant Californian

monotone by one of Hannah Montana's indistinguishable assistant nobodies - "Left hand down!" - and they're repeated over and over and over again like a mantra heralding the end of culture and meaning. accompanied by a pink and neon blue ticker tape parade of arrows and heart symbols. Aside from the fact that this plays like a calibration program, it also feels a bit like staring into the abyss, and is therefore difficult to recommend.

Abomination

'Use the time machine to go all over the world where strong people are says the electric-haired and terrifying Dr Brown at the start of **World** Heroes Anthology. Okay! It's much better than

my idea of going back in time and pretending that I invented chips or

hair gel or macroeconomics. But it's also sadly the only good part of any of the four games included here - World Heroes, World Heroes 2, World Heroes 2 Jet and the ambitious and misguidedly named World Heroes Perfect – which basically chart a savagely slow development from dated, sluggish and irrelevant fight nonsense to ever so slightly less dated, sluggish and irrelevant fight nonsense. It's like watching a painfully ugly but honest child grow up, and never falling in love with it.



reviewPS3
Golden Axe: Beast Rider



Retro grade

Golden Axe Beast Rider

1989 just called, and it wants its game back

here are two reasons why you'd resurrect an old series like Golden Axe: to do something new and clever within a familiar and bankable framework (like, say, Prince Of Persia) or to cash in mechanically on a wave of newer, vaguely similar titles. You've looked at the score already, right? This isn't the next Prince Of Persia

Instead, it's an ugly and badly put together fantasy adventure ('adventure' is maybe too strong – read that back with 'event' instead) in the mould of God Of War or, more recently and relevantly, Beowulf and Conan. Except it's even worse than those two – more brown and barren, and totally devoid of atmosphere. Most damningly, though, the combat is rubbish. It has a 'thing' to mark it out from the other butcher shop scrappers (a thing borrowed from Heavenly Sword,

What you do in... Golden Axe

5% Getting whacked in the face by attacks you blocked.

\$2% Launching comically slow magic attacks. Whooooost?

40% Geing mud-blind, which is like snow-blind but browner.

15% Whising you had a good old-fashloned horse to ride.

where it didn't really work in the first place). Enemies have two types of attack which either make their weapon glow orange (you're supposed to evade these with (1) or blue (you can parry these with (1)). Get the timing right and you can counter-attack or perform messy

Weapon of choice

The problem is that the parrying is weirdly unresponsive (weird because the evading isn't, at least not as much). So split-second brinkmanship – only breaking off from your own combo or recovering from another blow to block at the last moment – ends up with you being clobbered when you're sure you're pressing the right button. This trips up the fluency of the fighting and means there's none of the cut-thrust-parry, multi-enemy juggling that, say, God Of War gives you.

The rest of the game offers no compensation. Yeah, the bits with the pixies where you have to whack them for magic and health bonuses are still there, but now the pixie



▲ Most of the bosses look like stage props from a lost Spinal Tap tour. Feel the darkness, Leeds!



▲ Combat is interestingly designed but poorly implemented. The end result? A bit broken.



▲ Watch out with those big metal claws, fellas, if you're not careful you could do yourself an... oh.



Linfo Format PS3 ETA Out now Pub Sega Dev Secret Lev

Format PS3 ETA Out now Pub Sega Dev Secret Level Players 1 Web sega.co.uk/ goldenaxe It's like Mega Drive classics don't work on PS3.

look sneering and evil and the music's gone. Remember? It sounded a bit like the 'reveal' music from Catchphrase. 'Dee-do do-do dee do-do...' Anyway, it's gone and that's a bad thing.

And it gets worse. The levels are flat trawls through unimaginative landscapes packed with waves of meaty enemies, magical attacks have all the spectacle of a mis-launched firework ("Wait, did that even go off? That cost me six quid!") and the lizardragondogs that give the game its subtitle are weak. The first one you get has a whipping tail attack that kills people just fine but also leaves it

racing the wrong way after it swings, like a big-fisted drunk in a bar brawl.

And I'd offer you the same advice about the game as I would the drunk about his fight: it's not worth it, mate.

Nathan Ditum



Hatchback to basics

GTi Club+

Coin-op classic gets a budget PSN retread

ack in 1996, arcade racer GTI Club shunned the usual frictionless supercars and shimmering five-lane blacktops in favour of knockabout hot hatches and sinuous urban tracks that were stuffed with time-shaving shortcuts. Developed for PSN by Sumo Digital - the guys behind the outrageously enjoyable retro reboot of OutRun on PS2 - GTI Club+ aims to recast the game as a frenetic online racer for you and up to seven mates. But wipe the nostalgia from the windscreen and the ride isn't as supple as it was.

Wacky races

Happily the game's garage - all Mk.1 Golfs, Renault 5s and pre-bloat Mini Coopers - is as charmingly low budget as ever. The racing, meanwhile, features wild-eyed handbraking with cars pinging off the seaside scenery like rubber balls. Get used to the dinky cars' dodgemlike handling, though, and GTI Club+ will quickly put a smile on your face. The Côte d'Azur setting also provides some cracking, varied races around maze-like streets **PlayStation** that undulate wildly like rollercoaster tracks.

The reasonable asking price (just a tenner) soon starts to look pricier,





■ The tracks rise and fall dramatically like Alton Towers' finest 'coasters

however, when you realise there's only actually one town to race around. Play solo and the value of multiple shortcuts is also diminished by aggressive Al that forces you to rigorously stick to the fastest route if you want to have so much as a prayer of finishing first.

Which is why this will ultimately live or die by its popularity on the servers. Although it only has limited appeal playing solo, bombing

> around the sun-kissed streets in a Mini Cooper with your mates, Italian Job-style makes for throwaway fun.

David Meikelham



Coming soon to a PlayStation near you

	Ding.	14	140
Alone In The Dark: Inferno	Atari	28 Nov	PS3
Disney Sing It High School Musical 3	Disney	28 Nov	PS3/PS
Madagascar 2	Activision	28 Nov	PS3/PS
Resistance 2	Sony	28 Nov	PS3
SingStar: ABBA	Sony	28 Nov	PS3
SOCOM Confrontation	Sony	28 Nov	PS3
Prince Of Persia	Ubisoft	5 Dec	PS3
Crash Commando	Sony	18 Oec	PSN
Wanted: Weapons Of Fate	Warner Bros	18 Dec	PS3
Savage Moon	Sony	0ec	PSN
The Lord Of The Rings: Conquest	EA	9 Jan	PS3 •
50 Cent: Blood On The Sand	THQ	Jan	PS3
Burn Zombie Burn!	Pinnacle	Jan	PSN
Rag Ooll Kung Fu	Sony	Jan	PSN
Rise Of The Argonauts	Codemasters	Jan	PS3
Skate 2	EA	Jan	PS3
Bionic Commando	Capcom	Feb	PS3
Damnation	Codemasters	Feb	PS3
Destroy All Humans: Path Of The Furon	THQ	Feb	PS3
FEAR 2 Project Origin	Warners	Feb	PS3
Killzone2	Sony	Feb	PS3
The Godfather II	EA	Feb	PS3
Silent Hill Homecoming	Konami	Feb	PS3
Street Fighter IV •	Capcom	Feb	PS3
Wheelman	Midway	Feb	PS3
Resident Evil 5	Capcom	Mar	PS3
Tom Clancy's Hawx	Ubisoft	Mar	PS3
Watchmen	Warner Bros	Mar	PSN
WWE Legends Of Wrestlemania	THQ	Mar	PS3
Operation Flashpoint 2: Dragon Rising	Codemasters	Mar	PS3
Resistance Retribution	Sony	Mar	PSP
The Chronicles Of Riddick: AOOA	Atari	Mar	PS3
UFC 2009: Undisputed	THQ	Mar	PS3
Aliens: Colonial Marines	Sega	2009	PS3
Borderlands	Take Two	2009	PS3
DC Universe Online	SOE	2009	PS3
Ghostbusters	Atari	2009	PS3
Gran Turismo 5	Sony	2009	PS3
Mafia II	Take Two	2009	PS3
MAG	Sony	2009	PS3
Prototype	Activision	2009	PS3
The Agency	SOE	2009	PS3
This Is Vegas	Midway	2009	PS3
	-		

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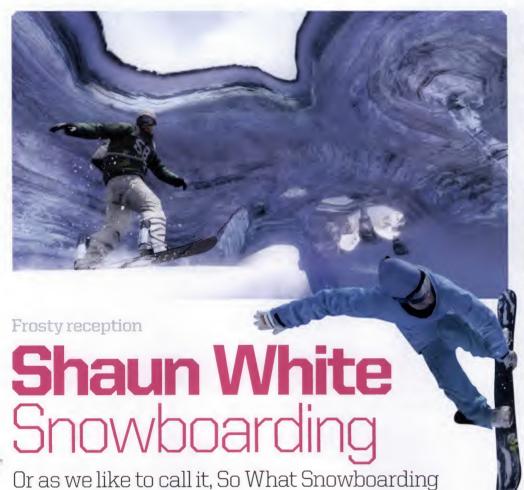
READY MADE EXCUSE #25

All release dates are accurate at time of press but liable to change.

a sickie for...

in town last night and had the zebra tartare. Yeah, I'm sitting in the bath just in - oh god, here it comes again...

Shaun White Snowboarding





■ The aim here is snowboarding realism, and SWS captures the dullness of reality very well.



■ Sadly, no après-ski mini-game in which you get lasered on schnapps with the chalet girls.



Landing tricks is woolly – it's possible *not* to crash even when you try your hardest.

ide-open mountains, realistic powder and events scattered everywhere – it's a sweet dream of free-roaming snowboarding. And it's going to stay a dream, because while SWS has all this, it misses the thing that makes you care: the fun.

While there are interesting features on the four mountains – deadly crevasses, avalanches, hidden areas and cold hard cash – the general jumps and rails are badly scattered. Few can be strung together into lines, as in SSX or Tony Hawk's, and the result is a staccato, trick-land-trick-land experience.

The responding argument is clearly that SWS is supposed to be realistic, and grinding thousands of yards over strings of objects isn't realistic. Certainly you're not taking your board off and spinning it around your neck, but while the controls



are innovative, unless you invest your own appreciation of the real-life difficulty, tricks feel limited. The left stick controls your board. Tricks, consequently, are performed by waggling the right stick while in the air rather than pressing designated face buttons. It takes a while to get into, but works reasonably well.

Move it

Part of why it works is the animation – you don't set a sequence off by pressing a button, you have full analogue control of where your legs are going all the time. Ironically, though, it's the generous leeway this brings that makes landing tricks a rather vague, rubbery affair. It's hard to crash unless you actually land on your head.

And there are other hints that this isn't you won't completely dedicated to the cause of realism – occasionally you find yourself falling over 100ft+ cliffs (often to flat landings) without your thighs shattering like icicles. And if you plunge into a crevasse or off the 'wrong' cliff (trial and error)

you rise again, just up the hill, like a zombie from the snow. It's a nice effect, but sadly it's down to the snow behaving like air rather than anything deliberate.

Which brings us to the graphics. Despite using the Assassin's Creed engine, Shaun White Snowboarding looks terrible. With the exception of the view from the Alaskan peak, it looks like it could have started development on PS2. And even with the mass of blank white spaces, objects are blocky, the trees are X-shaped and flat, the textures are blurry and the ice effects freakish. It's also juddery, while the seemingly photocopied character textures undermine all the 'customisation' (read: product placement) by making all your new kit drab and smudged. But then, if you don't worship arrogant, trust fund kids, you won't like the characters anyway.

The Burnout-style approach to online play is an extra lure

it's better than watching the calamitously thick AI

but nothing can fix the uneasy mix of low-key action at this game's chilly, pale heart.

Steve Williams

What you do in... SWS





Property tycoon

Monopoly

Pricey like Park Lane but just avoids jail

hat instantly recognisable board in pin-sharp HD! The top-hatted moustachioed mascot dude who excitedly escorts your token on every move! Those lush dice animations!



■ The last time we saw an elderly gentleman eyeing a dog like that the police and RSPCA were on the scene within minutes.

Really, the guestion is how could you not be excited about the prospect of getting your mates over for some heated rent-hoarding, hotel-building, Do-Not-Pass-Go, loser-taunting PS3 action?

Or, perhaps not. If you splurge 40 sheets on a console version of a board game expecting it to be the next Uncharted or GTA, then the only square you should be landing on any time soon is the one called 'Nuthouse'. And as a party game, this doesn't even come close to SingStar. But! On the off-chance that you have zero mates, don't own a table and/or can't be bothered to track down the Mayfair card that Uncle Barry lost last Christmas then this is very much the game for you.

You get a selection of nine boards ranging from traditional to wacky land tacky - a Cheese Board featuring places like Water Biscuit Barge and Port Stilton?



Hiiiiiiilarious). Everything is smartly presented, with easily navigable menus for managing properties and handling cash. And house rules are adjustable too, so you can tweak things such as whether or not tax money gets placed on the Free Parking square (it totally should!) and picked up when someone lands on it.

If that all sounds enthralling you'll pick this up and be pleasantly surprised: it's genuinely as good as a classic board

> game can be in console form. But if you're looking for more futuristic family fare, it has to be LittleBigPlanet. Still, for what it's worth, those dice animations really are the best we've ever seen. Ben Wilson



Midnight Club

Format PSP ETA Out now Pub Rockstar



Successfully adapting PS3 games for PSP requires careful compromise and, on the whole,

LA Remix gets it right. So necessary omissions - day/night cycle, incremental damage, deluxe city detailing and shortcuts - are balanced by faster career progression through LA's tuner ranks, a new territory-tagging multiplayer mode called Paint, and a second city - Tokyo. Crucially the handling (drift-focused with credible inertia) complements a sense of velocity that rides the cusp of what the eye can read on PSP's screen. The cost of this is a forgiving difficulty level and racing that subsequently feels

a bit anodyne compared to

MC on PS3. Paul Fitzpatrick



Star Ocean The First Departure

Format PSP ETA Out now Pub Square Enix



First Departure is a remake of the classic sci-fi RPG Star Ocean, which was never

released outside Japan. A shame. because in 1996, where the rigid turn-based antics of Final Fantasy were RPG law, its free-flowing real-time combat was fresh. Now, excessive dialogue and its slavish focus on XP for character development are creaky. Even the battles are mindless, as party members are Al controlled, leaving you to bash (X). The graphics are sharp, and the crisp new anime-style cut-scenes pretty, but like an internet date reaching for your hand over a candlelit

dinner this feels much older than it looks. Kim Richards

Football Manager Handheld

PlayStation.

Format PSP ETA Out now Pub Sega

PSP provides the best console version of FM to date. It's been crafted with real love, works so well on the move, and is improved further by the excellent 2D match engine ported from its PC brother. 8 Ben Wilson

Spider-Man

Format PS3 ETA
Out now Pub Activision

Half-arsed superhero rubbish. Like the recent Hulk and Superman games, Web Of Shadows open city feels flat and dull and the story's confusing and weak. Swinging is fun, but what the hell is the webbing actually sticking to? 4 Nathan Ditum



NCAA 09

Format PS3 ETA US import Pub EA



Madden 2009 was a thumper of an American football game, and this, its collegiate brother,

is even better. Essentially the same game with teens and early-20s replacing the pros and a much larger stack of teams (130-odd), the simple reason for it getting the nod over Madden is the longevity of its Dynasty mode. Instead of using the draft and trades to improve your side (like in the NFL), you instead recruit high school players from around the USA and Canada – making weekly phone calls to compare interests and abilities and inviting prospects to see your school in the hope of making a good impression. It's like a sports game mixed with an



RPG: unique, rewarding, and brilliantly conceived both on and off the pitch. Ben Wilson





Legendary lacks polish but it almost makes up for it with the spread and scale of its beasts.



Witnessing mythological creatures tearing Manhattan apart is Legendary's big hook.

Fantastical FPS

Legendary

Taking the myth?

pare a thought for the poor old Griffon. To date, the monstrous bird/lion mash-up's biggest claim to fame was having its wings ripped off by Kratos in God Of War II. Now there's this: a role in Spark Unlimited's latest underwhelming shooter (after the lacklustre Turning Point). And although Legendary lacks polish in much the same way as a dining room table left in the desert, it's mythology-in-Manhattan premise is just engaging enough for the Griffon to reclaim some of its dignity.

It opens impressively, with NYC ripped



when Pandora's Box (fabled to contain. the woes of the world) is opened. It's easy to get swept up in the apocalyptic atmosphere as you manoeuvre through mountains of debris, armed only with an axe, as fantasy monsters treat the Big Apple like a deli counter. Admittedly, it's a lot like Turning Point's 'Nazis invade New York!' opener, but seeing Griffons flip cop cars and chow down on screaming taxi drivers is obviously a lot more spectacular.

Crash of the Titans

Those kind of big cinematic showstoppers are undoubtedly Legendary's main draw, and there's a definite allure to shooting creatures from Greek literature in the face. Standout moments include battling a Cloverfield-sized Golem as the sun sets over Times Square, frantically wasting a werewolf after it breaks into your elevator and a desperate escape from the tentacles of a Kraken-like monster. It's a welcome break after shooting **PlayStation** roughly 12,346 Kevlar-clad soldiers in other shooters so far this year.

Unfortunately, though, these moments are too few and far between. And often you'll have to settle for long sewer slogs, fighting the infuriating Naris (think unwholesome Tinker Bells) or... oh... more Kevlar-clad soldiers. who in this case look like bad extras from Mystery Men. None of which helps with the already shaky pacing caused by load times of more than 25 seconds between deaths, and poorly-spaced checkpoints that needlessly drag the

A bigger problem, though, is the shooting itself. The guns actually feel responsive and pleasingly weighty, but their power is diluted by the fact that your enemies can eat lead like an industrial pencil sharpener. There's also a bunch of technical problems, like the unstable framerate when the screen gets busy, fugly textures, the clunky jumping dynamic and human characters who look like they're made from Play-Doh.

Legendary ends up coming across like one of the Ray Harryhausen movies it obviously took so much inspiration from. It feels cheap, it's often stupid,

and it looks dated by today's standards. Nonetheless, the undeniable charm of using automatic weaponry on magical monsters is just about enough to make it worth a look. David Meikleham

What you do in... Legendary 15% Enjoying the big cinematic set-pieces, but

5% Wondering how such a ludicrous plot got green lit. fearing the next boring bit 2%Stumbling across 40% Shooting Greek monsters/looking up Greek monsters on Wikipedia. looks lovely. 18% Cursing the gods for F 20% Trying not to think about how long it is until God Of War III comes out



onlinepromotion





Opening win for OPM XI

And there's still time for you to sign for us



ast issue we announced that OPM's FIFA 09 Online Challenge side had been selected from the swathes of you who applied through Games Radar. Our club is now up and running – it's called OPM XI – and there are still a few spaces available in the squad (no wannabe Ronaldos, thanks) so head over to gamesradar.com/fifa09onlinechallenge if you want to get involved.

The big news this month is that we've already played our first fixture, a friendly against a band of internet upstarts, and

recorded our first victory. This, despite the fact that we played as Arsenal while our cheeky opponents plumped for France. Ahead through an early goal by our very own Ben Wilson – playing on the left as Nasri – we conceded immediately (still celebrating, boss) and editor Tim's Van Persie missed a pen and a one-on-one before a late Adebayor winner.

What we need now are more opponents. If you have your own club side get on to Games Radar and register your details. The invincible season starts here.









Sign up to play our FIFA 09 side now

gamesradar.com/fifa09onlinechallenge





Axle roads

Burnout Paradise

Is PS3's best-supported online game still heavenly to play?



he online element of Burnout Paradise wasn't flawless at launch, but developer Criterion quickly fixed that with a patch. And it didn't stop there. Since the first, sizeable, bug-squishing patch (known rather dramatically as Bogart) there have been two further downloads and plenty of new content. First there was 'Cagney' back in June, bringing two new cars, new liveries, and new modes, and more recently we got 'Davis'. Now known more prosaically as the Bikes Pack, this download debuted motorcycles, a 24-hour clock and

weather, among a host of other small things. And all this stuff is free.

Why does Criterion continue to pour its efforts into Burnout Paradise and not charge a penny for it? It's either down to an impressively selfless desire to create the 'best online experience ever', or something to do with the in-game advertising even prospective American presidents have bought, and the way this revenue stream demands fresh incentives if it's to work properly. Weigh your cynicism against your heart and see which is heavier.

Is it possible to criticise something that's expanding for free? Yes. That's kind of what this page is about. Frankly, how much you get out of Paradise online depends quite strongly on your character – and that of your friends.

Criterion has envisaged a less competitive world than most designers, where it's as much about getting together to do (and outdo each other at) silly things as it is about winners and losers. The objectives tend to be more about gathering in one spot before charging off somewhere else to get group tallies of jumps, or seconds in the air, than about straight racing. In fact, with the new bikes pack there are no races. Instead you get 70 Freeburn challenges – 35 regular ones, 35 against the clock – a brand new set of road rules, 20 fresh Paradise Awards and 38 Burning Rides/Midnight Rides.

The Midnight Rides only appear as night falls after 8pm, and are trickier because you can't see where you're going. I say 'trickier' because they're still not actually hard – all the bike targets are very forgiving – and I say 'you can't see where you're going' without much exaggeration. Yes, it's dark and vision should be limited, but Paradise is not well lit. It's gloomy like a power cut in a mine rather than dark like a city at night. Nor does it help that



online_{PS3}

Burnout Paradise/Round-up





"So I know this little car park, very secluded, you just flash your lights once and it starts."

the weather effects are limited to thick fog, thin fog and middling fog

Dozy drivers

It's great fun if sociable messing about is more your thing than 'proper' racing and, more vitally, if you've got sociable friends. The alternative is waiting around while confused or stupid strangers struggle to find the objective until the host gets bored and either cancels it or quits the game. Navigation remains at least half the challenge (headsets are vital for herding the lost) whether you like it or not, and while we're moaning. there was enough disappearing traffic and haphazard Takedown detection for us to notice, too.

The two bikes (and their tweaked versions) look fantastic, sound hilan incredible and have riders with astonishing animations. Skip over a crest while leant over and flat out and it's fantastically dramatic, yet controlling these light and powerful machines is as easy and

well balanced as you could hope for. It's another slice of Criterion genius. There's no boost, however (you can tuck in for extra speed, though), to emphasise that these are toys rather than fully integrated vehicles. Boo, and indeed, hiss.

Less easy to understand is the lack of damage and pathetic crashes. The disappearing rider works fine – Burnout's never been about ragdolling bodies – but why the bikes don't bend and disintegrate like the cars is a mystery. If it's to keep things 'wholesome' it's not just a double standard but an active failure; the lingering post-crash shot of an undamaged bike with missing rider often feels quite sad.

Nevertheless there's plenty of hilarity to be had, and in the right company Paradise online is relaxed

yet competitive. And although a lot of the new stuff, such as the time and weather, is not very sophisticated (yet), Paradise City is evolving like no other.

Steve Williams



Online round-up

With **Leon Hurley**



Ah, the ritual humiliation of playing a game you'll never master against people who live and breathe it. My first mistake with **Wipeout HD** was picking Phantom Class, the warp speed, oh-God-it-hurts-my-eyes setting. A huge oversight, considering my

salami-fingered racing skills. My first race felt like trying to steer a bullet through Chinese plumbing as I ricocheted off every bend like a rank amateur. I left quickly, hanging my head in shame. Even on Venom Class, the baby speed for wimps, I limped from one clanging impact to the next. My greatest achievement for an evening's racing? Not last. Triple sigh.

love Tiger Woods PGA Tour 09

offline. Long, gentle games of fake golf that you can play at your leisure. It's the perfect antidote to the espresso-brain feeling you get when you've been playing shooters for a bit too long. The trouble with playing it online is



that it loses that sense of ease. Suddenly you're playing with real people; you're competing and the pressure's on. Double Bogey? Ur teh looz0r!
There's no chance to take a break, let your mind wander or relax anymore
— which sort of ruins it really.



It's party time and tonight we've come as Queen. The band, not her maj. The occasion is **SingStar Queen** – two downloadable packs from the SingStore each containing five of the band's best. Bicycle Race and One Vision barely get the evening going but

We Will Rock You started to get people interested – lured by the chorus and the chance to ham it up to the rap-ish verses. Invisible mic stands were grabbed and theatrical poses struck, creating the sort of memories that will return, with a sinking feeling in your gut the morning after. The real success, though, was Bohemian Rhapsody, which managed to suck people off the sofas like a musical hoover, creating a small riot by the Pringles and generic French lager. Headbanging, yes! Striking Freddie Mercury poses, no! Seriously gran, you'll put your hip out.

Download of the month

Have you ever woken up from a dream and found that the harder you try to remember it, the more confused you become? **Linger In Shadows** is very



much like that. It's a six-minute PS3 'film' about a cat, a dog, an evil smoke monster and a robot octopus thing set in a landscape that's part Greek ruins, part Streatham council estate. It gets weirder. Rather than simply watch the movie, you're encouraged to explore – using the shoulder buttons to move backwards and forwards – looking for various symbols and glitches. Find one and you can press buttons, wiggle the sticks, or shake the pad to 'break' the film and uncover new footage. Bizarre, short, but utterly fascinating.

directory PS3

PS3 buyer's quide



Essential collection

Build the ultimate PS3 library with our no-filler guide to the best next-gen games so far



LittleBigPlanet

Unleash your inner Miyamoto by creating and sharing your own levels online using the brilliantly simple but canyon-deep editing tools in Sony's phenomenal platformer. Absolutely essential



Pub Sony Dev Media Molecule



Call Of Duty 4 Modern Warfare

The SAS and US Marines invite you to fight the war on terror as Call Of Duty dumps WW2 for a modern-day setting. A beautiful, brutal and near flawless shooter



Pub Activision **Dev** Infinity Ward



Grand Theft Auto IV

It's everything you love about GTA - the twisted characters, epic missions and savage humour - polished to perfection. A true modern masterpiece.



Pub Rockstar Games **Dev** Rockstar North



Metal Gear Solid 4 **Guns Of The Patriots**

A typically esoteric but masterful end to Snake's saga, blending beautifully immersive action with a lifetime's worth of cut-scenes. Divisive but essential



Pub Konami **Dev** Konami Productions



Platformer Bioshock

Epic first-person adventure set in a ruined underwater city that combines brilliant genetic weapons with beautiful design, tons of atmosphere, and a genuinely affecting story.



Pub 2K Games Dev 2K Marin



RPG Oblivion Game Of The Year Edition

An adventure so vast and all consuming you'll lose months to its quests and battles. Now with Knights Of The Nine and Shivering Isles expansion packs



Pub Ubisoft
Dev Bethesda Softworks



Action-Adventure Uncharted Drake's Fortune

Treasure hunter Nathan Drake is after the fabled gold of El Dorado in this superb blend of action and physical puzzling. Think Gears Of War meets Tomb Raider.



Pub Sonv **Dev** Naughty Dog



Shooter Resistance 2

A sequel that masterfully surpasses the original. Nathan Hale returns to fight bigger aliens on American soil and delivers on gameplay, guns and polish



Pub Sony



Ratchet & Clank **Tools Of Destruction**

Platforming royalty return to save the galaxy. Exquisite graphics and a riotous arsenal of comedy weapons make this the pair's best interstellar outing yet.



Pub Sony



Music SingStar

Sony's much-loved karaoke game steps up to next-gen with a neater interface, online options and tons of tunes via SingStore. Outkast's Hey Ya and Killers' Mr Brightside are highlights.



Pub Sony
Dev SCE Studios London



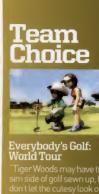


Elefunk



Pixeljunk Eden

Echochrome



Ben Wilson





Action Mirror's Edge

A real Marmite game. We loved it for the thrill of leaping across the glistening rooftops of a suspiciously perfect future city while pursued by trigger-happy cops. Idiots, meanwhile, didn't



Pub EA Dev DICE



FIFA 09

Impressively strong core gameplay on the pitch, ten-on-ten online matches and a new multiseason Be A Pro mode make this the top-scoring football choice on PS3.



Pub EA

Dev EA Canada



Sports **PES 09**

Can't match FIFA for licences, but the new Champions League and Become A Legend modes add depth and confirm PES's status as the traditionalist's footy game of choice.



Pub Konami Dev Konami

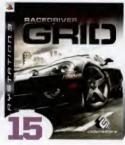


Shooter Far Cry 2

Dry, dusty, African sandbox run-and-gun action with an ace level editor. Not only do you have to avoid the bullets in your hunt for arms dealer The Jackal, there's malaria to deal with, too.



Pub Ubisoft **Dev** Ubisoft Montreal



Racer **Race Driver** Grid

Straight from the TOCA garage and into first place. Smooth mechanics, aggressive races and fine-tuned cars that make this the best racer yet on PS3.



Pub Codemasters **Dev** Codemasters



Racer Midnight Club Los Angeles

Rockstar's street racer comes of age, rediscovering tuner culture's West Coast roots with a superb recreation of the City Of Angels and punchy car handling.



Pub Rockstar Games **Dev** Rockstar San Diego



Music

Guitar Hero III Legends Of Rock

Deserved encore for the rock god, with a new battle mode, fierce songs and appearances from Slash and Tom Morello. Bourbon not included.



Pub Red Octane **Dev** Neversoft



Fighter Soulcalibur IV

Darth Vader aside, this is essential stuff. The swordplay is as accessible and strong as ever, with deep character customisation and online play completing the package.



Pub Ubisoft **Dev** Namco



Racer **Burnout Paradise**

The ultra-fast crash-obsessed racer goes open-world with no menus and no lobbies – just a massive city packed with races, events and hidden routes. DLC content is making it even better.



Pub EA Dev Criterion Games



Action **Dead Space**

Interstellar survival horror that robs from Bioshock, Resident Evil 4 and Event Horizon, but gets away with it thanks to looking beautiful, playing brilliantly and delivering some very big scares.



Pub EA

Dev EA Redwood Shores





The Last Guy



Super Stardust HD



Pixeljunk Monsters

rotect your villag



mail@opm



Christmas chaos, waiting for the dead to rise, a smashing idea, going over the top, word processors on PS3, and OPM's youngest reader.

Console wars

You know how Nintendo fans drool over Super Smash Bros Brawl? Well what about Sony's Insane Pile Up (hopefully they could think of something much, much better for the title) in which you get to pit Jak against Nathan Drake and play out Crash Bandicoot versus Old Snake! Think about it, Kratos could have a smack at Ratchet along with Cloud and Tombi, plus we could settle the war between the blobs of Locoroco and the eyeballing inhabitants of Patapon! It's certainly an idea, and I doubt I'm the first

From PlayStation hopes and fears to technical queries, this is the place to come for answers

Email us at opm@futurenet.com or write to Letters, OPM, Future Publishing, 30 Monmouth Street, Bath BA1 2BW. Letters may be edited for length and clarity.

to have thought of it, but as far as stupendously successful rip-offs go, how bad could this be? **Oliver Atkinson**. by email

Nice idea, and you win this month's prize – a year's subscription to the magazine. Wait, what the hell would sackboy's special attack be? Unbridled creativity?

Early adopter

I just thought I would send you this picture of my daughter, whom I found loving your magazine, But was it the great design? Was it the bright pink colours or sackboy? Only 22 weeks old, it looks like I will have to wait a couple of years to find out, but I will keep you informed!

On behalf of **Matilda Grace Stokes**

Does she have an outfit that co-ordinates with the Operation Flashpoint feature too?

Dead head

I have just been told about an abomination called Dead Rising: Chop Till You Drop for Nintendo Wii. Why? Were the creators on drugs when they came up with the idea? Wii can't cope with the demanding gameplay and graphics like the PS3 could. The original [which was an Xbox 360 exclusive – undead ed] was

Bagsy Ratchet if Sony ever 'does' a Super Smash Bros.

✓ A reader's daughter gives her approval to our LBP cover.



amazing and I fell in love with it. Everyday I pray that the makers of Dead Rising have an epiphany and realise the needs of PS3 owners. Also, no other developers have thought of making similar game: it could even be called Rising Dead with a man called Mark East!

Adrian Aguilera, by email

It sticks in our throats like a particularly stringy piece of cheerleader that, with its hundreds of walking cadavers on-screen at once, Dead Rising remains one of the most obviously 'next-gen' games so far. To make matters worse, it also played brilliantly – nailing the line between

outright horror and comedy gore that Romero's best zombie movies trademarked. And anyone who complains about the save system is an idiot. (You can use any of the toilets!)

All of which makes us super-sad that Wii owners are getting a nerfed version of the original while we miss out. Or at least it would do, if we weren't keeping a big secret. More soon, corpse fans.

Trench talk

It's well-documented that people are tired of the WW2 scene, so how abut WW1? Imagine it: a first-person shooter set on the Western Front, assaulting the German trenches as a battle-weary Brit



while your comrades drop like bags of sand, but you push on and kill the Germans (not Nazis) in vicious close combat. Or perhaps mowing down waves of Germans with a machine gun? The trench warfare would also provide a great setting and create a completely different type of shooter.

Ryan Davies, by email

A different sort of shooter, yes, but given that you'd be cut in two within seconds of going over the top, not necessarily a huge advance for the genre. In the unlikely event you survive the first few seconds of Level One, maybe there could be a buttonmatching mini-game in which you have to write shell-shocked poetry.

Offender profiling

I am addicted to Call Of Duty 4's online mode. I have three gold guns and have played for a total of six days and three hours. I have met many people. In that time, I have had approximately three arguments. I've also met over 150 friends. So I cannot understand why when I played my friend's Xbox 360 (sorry) to get him up some ranks, I got in an argument with some lairy nerd (who called me ancient Egyptian swear words I don't understand). The same thing happened in every lobby! I have come to the conclusion that PlayStation people are cool, laid back dudes. Xbox is for angry nerds with pocket protectors. And neck-ties.

Matt Napier, by email

Sadly, none of the three hardware platforms can claim to have the exclusive on idiots.

Bad dates

This summer was the worst that I can remember; all it did was rain. I became so bored, especially as there were no really good games released. I know that publishers kept games back for the Christmas period, but now I fear that a number of games, even some very good games, will not get a look in and the sales they deserve because the market will be full of releases and parents won't know which ones to buy. I have a long list of games that I would really like for Christmas, but I know that I will not get them all. I hope that next year we will see a more sensible spread of release dates over

Chris Starkey, by email

the year.





How green is PS3?

SCE is working to reduce power consumption of PS3. One of the results is that Power Save Settings' is now available by upgrading to firmware v2.50.

☑ Soulcalibur IV avoided the Xmas

game glut and did well.

We hope so, too, It's been like Die Hard 2 around here this Christmas - only with big name PS3 releases replacing passenger jets running low on fuel. And, as you suggest, most of us don't have either the money or the free time to play them all. The industry's chicken and egg financial argument is well-rehearsed; games get released in the winter because games sell well in the winter. But look at the likes of Race Driver Grid and Soulcalibur IV, which both sold well in the middle of the year, and the rewards for more daring publishers should be obvious.

Write on

The PS3 has had a lot of great new features added lately, such as the introduction of Trophies and the PlayTV service, but I can't help feeling that simple features are being overlooked in favour of more innovative ones. Personally, I feel that a simple word processing program like Notepad could come in very useful, or even the ability

to simply save and access text documents from the hard drive. With something as simple as that, and preferably the help of a USB keyboard, it would suddenly become very easy to keep detailed notes on

your game progress that could be quickly accessed from the XMB. Too often, notes written by hand (such as keeping track of equipment etc in turn-based strategy games) seem to disappear within a few days or prove difficult to keep track of. Surely the ability to keep

notes saved on the console makes sense?

Matt Dorney, by email

Ooh, and spreadsheets too! Can we have spreadsheets? Can we? Pleeeeease Sony...

Off the **Wall**



Choice cuts from the OPM Facebook group

COD's new dogs

"Maybe we'll have comical strings of sausages to stop them?" Stewie Hitchcock

Flashpoint of view

"The thought of sneaking through an field with a sniper rifle surveying a huge battle and knowing just one bullet could kill me sounds intense." Steve Deathbat

LBP love

"If OPM don't put it in the top five, I'll eat something usually deemed inedible." Stephen Tailby

Call my lawyer!

"Jack Thompson warned me about people like you: (." **Glenn Dawson**

Man in the Mirror's Edge

"Been excited about it since the start. However, having said that. I was excited about Haze from the start..." **Blythe Furness**

Revenge of the nerds

"When exactly was it that geekdom became a bad thing? Nobody told me-I was too busy sitting around in my Thundercats T-shirt watching a six-movies-plus-Clone-Wars-animated-series Star Wars marathon with my Pot Noodle." Jen Stunt

Send your questions to: opm@futurenet.com



whois...

Jubei Yagyu
Onimusha 2's scourge of demons

As the Jack Bauer of 16th century Japan, Jubei Yagyu is badass through and through. Half demon (thanks Mum) he's able to suck up the life force of slain hellspawn and make it his own in combat. It's a gift that gets a workout when crazy Japanese overlord Nobunaga Oda, killed in the first game, returns to lead a second demon army to power - a campaign that starts with Jubei's village. Backed up by a quartet of warriors, Jubei wants revenge. And when it comes to righteous anger and lightning swordplay, he's an unstoppable force.

Coolest moments

Self-titled Greatest swordsman of all the demons', Gogy is, in fact, an insufferable git. He survives several run-ins with lubey on finally

demon murder, Juber gets to trade items with



Final boss battle





PlayStation

remains an enigina through in uch of the garne eriving Jubei crazy in the process. Turns out to be bad guy Nobunaga's sister, which could make for awkward family reunions.

Magoichi Saiga

Leader of the Saiga gun troop, Magoichi is a great person to befriend as his rifle provides invaluable long-range backup in battle. Hint: he loves reading, so pony up any books you find on your travels.

Best weapons









EKEI ANKOKUJI
Monk Ekei is our kind of ally. He's a
bumbling drunk with big dreams and
a love of adult literature. Magoichi
can't stand his guts but this big lug is
handy in a fight, and provides some
much needed comic relief.

Kotaro Fuma

This irritating ninja is a bit of a whiner throughout the game, right up to the he does correctly guess that Oyu is what she seems. Know it all.



Juhei's likeness is based on Yusaku Matsuda, who starred opposite Michael Douglas in Black Rain. He died in 1989 before the film made him a star



Gallicicon Jean Reno plays a cop in Onimusha 3. Actor Takeshi Kaneshiro also plays' Samanosuke in that game and in the upcoming Onimusha movie



The character of Jubei Yaqyu is inspired by Yagyu Sekishusai Muneyoshi (1527-1606), one of the most famous swordsmen in Japanese history



Onimusha 2's plot has 'similarities' to anime classic Ninja Scroll - its lead character, Jubei, is a demon hunter and its villain leads a demon army



Jubei only got to front Onimusha 2, but a relative of his, Akane 'Jubei' Yagyu, is an important character in the awful Onimusha: Dawn Of Dreams.























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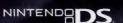
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